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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of faculty, staff, and administrative participants involved in Northwest Community College's (Oregon) strategic planning process. Section 1 profiles the present-day community college, emphasizing changes in students and curriculum, increased competition, technological imperatives, and faculty development. Section 2 presents a literature review that focuses on topics of leadership, institutional effectiveness, learning organizations, assessment, strategic planning, governance, and participation in community colleges, specifically the Oregon Community College System. Section 3 discusses study methodology and design. Section 4 presents findings in four stages of the study, with analyses of focus groups, ethnographics, follow-up surveys, and a research summary. Section 5 contains hypotheses, discussion, and recommendations. The findings of this study suggest that: (1) staff participation in an organization's strategic planning process results in a deeper staff understanding of the organization's mission, a higher staff commitment to the organization's goals, and a demonstration of greater staff energy and vitality; (2) the process of strategic planning implementation will differ among colleges and departments; (3) when managers serve as facilitators, staff will self-organize and leadership will take a variety of forms; and (4) community college staff who encounter strategic planning can be categorized as "Guarded Optimists," "Curmudgeons," "Crusaders," or "Along for the Ride," based on levels of frustration and optimism. Appended are institutional effectiveness guidelines, the strategic planning form, glossary, and a feedback survey. (Contains approximately 100 references.) (AS)

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ED 461 402

Staff Perceptions of a Participatory Strategic Planning Process at One Community College

by

Eve L. McDermott

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Education

Completed May 8, 1998
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Eve L. McDermott for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on May 8, 1998. Title: Staff Perceptions of a Participatory Strategic Planning Process at One Community College.

Abstract approved: ______________________
Ruth E. Stiehl

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of participants involved in one community college's strategic planning process in which faculty, administrators, and staff at all levels of the organization were encouraged to participate. Data were collected through direct observation, focus group interviews, analysis of institutional documents, and a pen and paper questionnaire. Data were analyzed through a constant comparative method. Reduction of the data produced themes exploring the reaction of participants to the new strategic planning process.

This qualitative study generated four hypotheses that relate to these research questions:

1. Staff participation in an organization's strategic planning process results in a deeper staff understanding of the organization's mission, a higher staff commitment to the organization's goals, and a demonstration of greater staff energy and vitality.

2. Community college departments will interpret and implement institutional strategic planning processes in ways that are unique and congruent with their academic discipline; a single process cannot be successfully dictated.

3. When managers serve as facilitators or use others to facilitate strategic planning processes, staff will self-organize, a process will emerge, and leadership will take a variety of forms.

4. Community college staff who encounter change in strategic planning processes can be categorized as *Guarded Optimists*, *Curmudgeons*, *Crusaders*, or *Along for the Ride*, based on levels of frustration and optimism.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Obtain acceptance of terminology from all units before beginning the participatory strategic planning process. Use acceptable terms in form/templates and in facilitation.

2. Do not dictate a single process for strategic planning across all disciplines. Design forms and processes that are adaptable to differences in styles of critical thinking.

3. Use facilitators to assist units in the participatory strategic planning effort. Train the facilitators to work in ways that empower participants.

4. Reduce participant frustration and increase optimism by providing sufficient time, creating sustainable feedback loops, both of which demonstrate that the unit manager has thought through the process.

5. Increase participation in strategic planning processes to gain deeper understanding of the organization's mission, higher commitments to organizational goals, and a demonstration of greater energy and vitality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Any great learning is a journey. On this journey:

Jim and I lost a million golf balls

Candy and I ran a marathon and shared our life stories

I found I needed a puppy named Shaker

I bought my first Harley, and went to the community college to learn to ride it

My mentor Margaret became a President

I gained a daughter Cassandra

I lost a son Danny at sea

I found a daughter Jeni and a granddaughter Stormy

I cherished golden blanket moments with 20 best friends, Cohort two

I became a part of a web, the community college future

I learned a lot.

Thanks go to Ruth, my committee, my husband, and for the love of my family and friends.

Don't sweat the small stuff, it is important to bring people together, and always travel the world with an open heart.

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STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF A PARTICIPATORY STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AT ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the perceptions of staff participants involved in a new participatory strategic planning process at Northwest Community College (NWCC). The knowledge gained from this study is qualitative in nature, context specific, and situationally relevant. Its context is the American community college.

At the end of this century, community colleges are at a crossroads in their organizational development. This is due primarily to an uncertain and volatile educational environment that requires new forms of leadership and management. As a way to respond to this changing environment, many community colleges are emphasizing planning and participatory governance models. My study followed one community college's response to the changing environment in its initiation of a participatory strategic planning process. The investigation followed the planning process for a 3-year period with the goal of understanding staff perceptions about the process. Understanding how staff perceive participatory strategic planning processes will help managers develop processes relevant and important to participants. In turn, more committed participants will lead to more effective participatory planning processes.

BACKGROUND

The network of American community colleges has been described as the only sector of higher education that can be called a "movement." From their inception, public community colleges have been "the people's colleges," characterized by an open-door policy, comprehensive service, and dedication to classroom teaching. With a broad mission of accessible education for all, the community college system has become the place where the less privileged can grasp the opportunities that would otherwise be out of reach (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). Discussions about the mission, role, and function of the community college may best be understood by examining the evolution of the institution itself.

The 1940s saw the birth of the community college. It is likely that the initial statement of the comprehensive community college's mission evolved from the report of the President's [Truman] Commission on Higher Education in 1947. The commission postulated five characteristics:

> 1. The community college must make frequent surveys of its community so that it can adapt its program to the educational needs of its full time students.
> 2. Since the program is expected to serve a cross section of youth population, it is essential that consideration be given not only to apprentice training but also to cooperative procedures which provide for the older students alternative periods of attendance at college and remunerative work.
> 3. The community college must prepare its students to live a rich and satisfying life, part of which involves earning a living. To this end, the total educational effort, general and vocational, of any student must be a well integrated single program, not two programs.
> 4. The community college must meet the needs of its students who will go on to a more extended general education or to specialized and professional study at some other college or university.
> 5. The community college must be the center for the administration of a comprehensive adult education program (President's Commission, 1947, Vol. 3, 5). (Ratcliff, 1994, p. 19)

The emphasis of the President's Commission on vocational and community-based education provided the conceptual foundation for the comprehensive community college, while the G.I. Bill, in 1944, provided the financial means whereby enrollments could begin to grow dramatically. Once again, in the 1960s, use of the G.I. Bill by Vietnam veterans fueled community college growth. *Building Communities*, a report from the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988), reported that between 1965 and 1975, enrollment at community, technical, and junior colleges grew by 240%. For the first time, in the fall of 1987, community colleges enrolled more than half of all first-time freshman entering college in the United States, comprising the largest sector of higher education in the United States. This trend continued into the fall of 1993, when the Census Bureau survey found that more 18 to 19-year-olds were attending community colleges than any other segment of higher education ("College Enrollment by Age," 1996).

The 1947 President's Commission suggested the name *community college* be applied to institutions designed to serve chiefly local community educational needs. As planned by the Commission, community colleges could have various forms of organization and could have curricula of various lengths. Their dominant feature was to be their intimate relationship to the life of the communities they served (Gleazer, 1968). During the growth era (1965 to 1975), public policy emphasized *quantity* education as a response to the need for promoting access to a college education. Community colleges, with their emphasis on numbers of students and their goal to serve every member of the community, were ideally suited to meet community needs. From the beginning, "community college planning has been anchored in the assumption that there are no real limits on the kinds of students they should serve or the programs they develop" (Knoell, 1980, p. 45).

In the last 6 years, the phenomenal growth in the community college movement has slowed. This is primarily due to smaller high school graduating classes, low unemployment, and the expiration of Vietnam veterans' benefits. There is growing evidence at many community colleges in the northwestern part of the United States that student headcount is continuing to grow, but full-time equivalency (FTE) has dropped or remained flat. More people are attending college, but those who are attending are taking fewer credit hours.

While more people need to be served and processed, the same number of FTE is being measured. With resources dwindling and student intentions and demographics changing, community colleges have found themselves face-to-face with the challenge of redefinition: they need planned strategies to meet these changing times.

The Community College in 1998

The community college has a history of being responsive to community needs, and this responsiveness has never been as critical to its existence as it is today. In the rapidly changing economic and social environment of the late 1990s, the community college must read, interpret, and chart a strategic course. According to George Keller (1983), specific factors are driving change and redefinition of the role of all institutions of higher education, including community colleges at the end of this century.

Changing Student Clientele

As recently as 1979, nearly all students in America's colleges were between the ages of 17 and 24 (Keller, 1983). But in 1991, there were one million fewer 18-year-olds enrolled in higher education than there were in 1979 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1993). The characteristics of these 18-year-olds are quite different from what they were in 1979. Enrollment by race and ethnicity shows an increasing proportion of American college students who are minorities. In 1976, 15.7% were minorities, compared with 21.2% in 1991 (NCES, 1993). The *Chronicle for Higher Education Almanac* (1996) reported that 29.1% of students were minorities in 1994. There were fewer white students and more African-Americans, as well as more Hispanic and Asian students ("College Enrollment Trends," 1996). These statistics reflect the fact that the United States itself has become a radically different nation ethnically.

Despite decreases in enrollment of the traditional college-age student, total higher education enrollment has been rising in the last three decades. While the higher proportion of recent high school graduates attending college has contributed to the increased numbers, the number of older college students has been growing faster than that of students under the age of 25. Between 1980 and 1990, the enrollment of younger students increased by 3%. During the same period, enrollment of older students rose by 34%. From 1990 to 1998, the NCES projects a 14% growth in enrollments in persons over 25 and an increase of only 6% in the number under 25 (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1993).

Fewer students now study four consecutive years at one college and fewer study full-time. Between 1984 and 1994, part-time enrollment increased 28%, while full-time enrollment increased 15%. In this same time period, 43% of all students were attending college part-time, including some of the most gifted students (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Shift in College Curriculum

In recent years, the desire for a traditional liberal arts education has been declining in American communities. At the same time the United States has moved from elite to mass higher education, with an all time high of one-third of 18 to 24-year-olds engaged in post-secondary education. The termination of America's dominance of the world economy from 1945 to 1974, when the U.S. achieved unprecedented wealth, has led more young people to educate themselves for work rather than leisure. When higher education costs a student $50,000 or more, a young person's thoughts are more likely to be on economic returns (Keller, 1983).

Increase in Competition

Another factor that is causing community colleges to redefine their role is competition from corporations, private training companies, public schools, and service agencies. Alfred and Carter (1996) list five areas of competition that are reshaping the post-secondary education market:

1. Companies and corporations are providing onsite programs for current and future workers. Corporations have the advantage of specific up-to-date technology and equipment that a community college may not be able to afford.

2. Corporate giants in the communications industry have the capability for distance delivery into homes, workplaces, shopping centers, and areas where people congregate. Community colleges rarely have the resources for the technicians or the technology for this kind of delivery.

3. Supplementary education providers, such as private tutoring companies, have proven techniques which produce positive learning outcomes for students. Tailor-made, variable length education courses are not what community colleges usually deliver.

4. K-12 schools are partnering with business and industry to prepare work-ready youth, thus bypassing the need for a community college 2-year training degree.

5. Temporary service agencies are using training programs to prepare flexible workers for many different jobs. This just-in-time trained worker has gained in popularity in recent years.

Technological Imperative

Exactly how computers are to be integrated into everyday college life and how they are to be paid for, is a critical intellectual and financial issue for all higher education institutions. This issue is leading to new links between industry and universities. The issue is also driving *cooperative education*, whereby students work for part of their collegiate careers in industries using the latest equipment, mixing campus knowledge with industrial experience. There is a new definition of extension services: distance learning. How this new technology will impact higher education markets is unclear. Alfred and Carter (1996) claim that "the new technology will do as much to higher education as television has done to newspapers" (p. 13). Their suggestion is that distance education will replace traditional delivery as the primary source for students and will define access to education in a completely new way.

Tightening Grip of Outside Controls

The movement in which community colleges became community-based learning centers largely resulted from two fundamental assumptions that are no longer valid. First, it was assumed that funding formulas guaranteed that more students would translate into more income and that there would be unlimited resources for instructional services. The second assumption was that more students would translate into more political support for enriching these formulas. Both assumptions now appear incorrect. Legislators are placing funding caps on many public institutions, including community colleges, and it appears that those served represent an uncertain basis of support for reversing these policy decisions (Richardson & Rhodes, 1985).

The greatest current change in governance is not the rise of student power or faculty power, but the rise of public power in educational programs. The force of public accountability has great financial implications. For example, since 1990, higher education officials in the State of Oregon have been locked in a battle with penury. Voters approved a rollback in property taxes in 1990 (Measure 5) that gutted the spending on all state agencies

(Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1996). Then again, in 1996, the Oregon voters passed Measure 47, described as follows in the *Voters Guide*:

> The Legislative Revenue Office estimates that local governments and schools together will lose an estimated $467 million in revenue statewide in 1997-98, $533 million in 1998-99, and increasing amounts the following years, and the measure does not provide any means of replacing those losses. The measure requires voter approval to shift any property tax to even minor fees or assessments without public approval and creates an expensive, confusing legal nightmare by requiring local governments to refund money to people who have paid such fees since June 30, 1995 (e.g., fees to use county parks, local swimming pools, or for supplies used in county hospitals). It increases the difficulty of passing new levies above the 3% cap in any levy election which occurs in odd-numbered years by requiring at least 50% of all registered voters to cast a ballot, in effect allowing people to vote "No" by not voting. (League of Women Voters, 1996)

The low confidence level in the public sector is a powerful concern for all public entities. Similar measures have been proposed in Washington and passed in California, reflecting a general dissatisfaction with public programs at the end of this century.

Faculty Conundrum

Another factor that is causing community colleges to redefine their role is the change in human resources, which constitutes 80-85% of their budgets. The average age of faculty members in community colleges is rising. Fewer new members are being hired in the face of fiscal limitations. At the same time, the high technology industry is hiring the best they can find and paying salaries community colleges cannot offer. As a result merit increases and differential pay for technology-related disciplines have created a two-tiered faculty salary scale in the community college. There has been a significant increase in the use of part-time instructors.

Market conditions are pressing colleges to design courses and programs that students, not teachers, find attractive. In addition, faculty are asked to support student recruitment and retention. Roeche (1996) predicts this broader role envisioned for faculty can negatively affect staff vitality, particularly when outmoded contracts do not reward or account for the kind of time this important work takes. Roeche has claimed that another assumption can be made: most community colleges will replace about half of their full-time faculty in the next decade, as well as an equal number of college administrators.

As a result of these factors (changing clientele, shift in curriculum, increased competition, technology, outside controls, and faculty conundrum), community colleges have been forced into a balancing act in which they have pursued unlimited objectives with limited resources, relying upon efficiency and technology to make up the difference instead of pursuing effectiveness defined by how well agreed-upon priorities are being accomplished. The effect of pursuing too many goals with too few resources has been apparent in a growing concern about diminished faculty vitality (Richardson, 1988).

Call for Change in Management Style

Because of all the above factors, it is imperative that college and university faculty and leaders plan for the changes that are occurring by adopting an active, change-oriented management style. Dale Parnell, author of *Dateline 2000, The New Higher Education Agenda* (1990), observed:

> One of the problems facing the leaders in education is keeping up with the sheer speed of change. This problem can be symbolized by an observation from a General Motors executive when queried as to why GM did not enter into more partnerships with colleges and universities. He replied, "Their speed is deceptive . . . they are slower than they look." (Parnell, 1990, p. 7)

Changing student clientele, shift in college curriculum, technological imperative, tightening of outside controls, and faculty conundrum are leading to the end of the traditional, unobtrusive style of organizational leadership on community college campuses. The new leadership that is needed will be both active and intrusive. Keller, as early as 1983, proposed that American higher education needed to transcend the current faculty-administration stalemate, to take its own management more seriously, and to create new forms of institutional decision-making if it were to cope with and help shape the new environment in which it found itself (Keller, 1983). This need is even greater in 1998.

A looming issue on many community college campuses in the late 1990s is the need to bring outdated administrative structures and systems into line with new visions about what a college should be and how it should deliver education. Discussions with college leaders about organizational change inevitably turn to strategies that can be used to redesign the institution. Conventional wisdom asserts that colleges which fail to change will lose ground to competitors who are eager to capture new markets. "Losing ground is easy to understand – it is a loss of market share followed by a decline in enrollment and operating revenue and, ultimately, in competitiveness" (Roeche, 1996, p. 12). Despite the persuasiveness of this argument, campus leaders are only now beginning to discover that the nation's colleges are falling behind. Burdened with high fixed costs, outdated programs and management systems, and hierarchical administrative structures, community colleges are caught in a vortex of change that threatens to undermine their competitiveness. Alfred and Carter (1996) claim that, "tinkering will not be enough. The only way out will be to develop structures and leadership that create new forms of value for students and, in so doing, enable community colleges to get to the future first" (p. 14).

Some of the characteristics of a new management style are coming into focus. According to Keller (1983), these characteristics include the following:

1. Administrators are replacing their passive role with a more active one.
2. Finance is assuming a new prominence.
3. Campus governance is taking new forms.

4. The communications process is becoming more open.

5. Both quality and productivity of people are becoming more important.

6. Technology is becoming a more integral tool for management to meet both external and internal demands.

7. The future is becoming as important as the present and the past, and administration is yielding to management. Management, unlike administration, demands leadership and the motivation of others, using information, ideas, and well-conceived purposes. The whole community college organization needs to be stimulated to look ahead, think of long-term consequences, and be alert for new opportunities; this is the role of management.

8. The external environment and the market are receiving more attention.

9. Planning is becoming essential.

Planning

As the public and private organizational environment becomes more uncertain, effective planning is increasingly important (Goodstein, Nolan, & Pfeiffer, 1992; Green, 1987). Education is not immune to the accelerating rate of change. Colleges and universities must adapt to powerful, pervasive forces that alter the environment in which they operate. Strategic planning describes a type of planning that focuses on a matching process between external opportunities and trends, internal strengths and weaknesses, and personal values of staff and community (Shirley, 1983). Its primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution's future to anticipate changes in the environment in such a way that the acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, good will) is faster than the depletion of resources (Cope, 1987). Parekh (1977) has suggested that while college administrators may be aware of environmental changes, they are typically poor strategic planners. Plans that currently exist are usually too general to provide useful guidance for all organizational levels and often remain unused. Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer (1992) stated, "Our experience as consultants to a wide variety of organizations has convinced us that most strategic planning processes are poorly conceptualized and poorly executed; the process is often not very creative and it is tactical rather than strategic in nature; and the so-called strategic plan rarely impacts the day-to-day decisions made in the organization" (p. 14). This gap in planning impact is critical to the community college made up of interconnected, highly specialized units. Strategic planning should be a conduit that keeps the units working in harmony toward the same end (Deegan, 1992).

In the past, professional literature on management science, operations research, management information systems, and planning have offered decision makers tools that were prescriptive and technical, often inflexible, and unduly focused on techniques, often to the exclusion of many critical factors of successful implementation. Program budgeting, zero-based budgeting, and related techniques of resource allocation and budgetary support have ignored many of the realities of the functioning organization. These approaches have tended to create large reports that have had little impact on the day-to-day interactions with customers.

The challenges faced by colleges and universities in the 1980s encouraged leaders to move beyond incremental solutions and focus on the strategic planning approaches that also began to emerge during this period. Keller (1983) has characterized these approaches as a "third way," which incorporates the best aspects of rational and political/incremental decision making. More leaders have begun taking proactive stances when examining the environment rather than the reactive stances that have traditionally characterized responses to decline (Keller, 1983). Master planning reemerged, but with a more proactive, change-agent orientation and with a greater focus on outcomes, program quality, and institutional effectiveness.

As planners in higher education confront the challenges of the 21st century, they can avail themselves of strategic planning processes. However, the challenges and opportunities of the late 1990s are perplexing. On one hand, the economic impact of recession in the early 1990s demands that the cost of higher education be controlled; pressures for productivity improvement have caused a wave of retrenchment and cutbacks, much like the management decline efforts of the late 1970s. On the other hand, the opportunities facing higher education in the use of technology to achieve distributed learning and research networks, to enhance curriculum, and to address the educational needs of hypergrowth metropolitan areas are as exciting as any that have ever faced the nation's post-secondary education enterprises and the need to achieve diversity and inclusiveness in educational organizations is receiving even greater attention (Norris & Poulton, 1991). To meet these challenges, colleges are seeking new paradigms of operation that will enable them to address their traditional roles with greater effectiveness and to reach out to new partnership opportunities and obligations.

In describing results from a 1992 survey of community college CEOs, William Deegan (1992) noted that while most CEOs had expanded efforts in the area of institutional research and data gathering, few reported their efforts to be successful. Data from the same study revealed that while strategic planning is the most widely used concept, there appeared to be a significant gap between the degree to which strategic planning goes on in institution-wide contexts and the degree to which strategic planning goes on at the department level. In Deegan's study of U.S. community college CEOs, 89% reported using strategic planning in an institution-wide context, while only 39% of the CEOs reported using strategic planning at the department level of their institutions. One has to wonder to what extent a strategic plan is really carried out if there is a relatively low degree of follow-up at the department level. CEOs cited additional problems of staff morale, resistance, burn-out, and general unpleasantness. According to Gratton and Walleri (1992), these findings are not unrelated. One key to an institutional effectiveness program is an integrated, systematic approach to the development of the total organization, beginning with strong linkages between staff competency and staff involvement in such institutional processes as research and strategic planning. Not only must a college generate research and valid data, but staff must have access to and the capability and commitment to process, use, and plan for change based on appropriate information (Gratton & Walleri, 1992). This commitment to the process can only be achieved with a better understanding of the process of strategic planning itself. Of particular importance is an understanding of the relationship that strategic planning has to strategic thinking and decision-making at the specialized unit level in day-to-day operations.

PARTICIPATION

In a review of the literature from 1975 to 1985, Palmer (1985) found that, although most community colleges spoke of participatory governance, they meant simply providing individuals opportunities to sit on institutional committees. Effective participative governance means far more than creating adjunct committee appointments as mechanisms for involving college constituents. Instead, participation needs to be reconceptualized to mean empowerment. Empowering means not only seeking participation in decisions but also giving individuals the influence to get things done (Kanter, 1983). Those closest to the problem and the impact of the decision need to be centrally involved in determining processes, making decisions, and assessing effectiveness (Anthony 1989; Kanter 1983; Sherr & Lozier, 1991).

Like governance models and administrative strategies that have come before it, participative strategic planning is not a panacea for community colleges in the 1990s. It does not solve resources problems, make institutions more accessible to women and minorities, nor automatically make them more responsive to their environment. Unlike traditional bureaucratic structures or strategies such as management by objectives, participative strategic planning does provide opportunities for working within current resource constraints and organizational limitations. It allows leaders to draw upon the talents and expertise of community college members for setting goals and objectives, solving problems, and creating alternatives. Unlike tactical plans that are predominately written for an annual time frame, strategic planning evaluates opportunities on more variable time lines. This flexibility in the planning process affords to members throughout the college a different level of ownership, involvement, and commitment than past approaches to planning and governance (Twombly & Amey, 1994).

If leadership is a process instead of an outcome, and if leaders can exist throughout the community college, we must re-vision the roles of leaders. Leaders at different organizational levels may exhibit different leadership skills and be involved in different leadership activity to varying degrees (Kouzes & Posner, 1987). This perspective allows for leadership to be enacted in new ways apart from those actions traditionally associated with college presidents. It allows college members to draw upon personal strengths, contributing to a leadership compendium. Part of re-visioning leadership then becomes the development of organizational partnerships and the pooling of members' talents and strengths in creative new ways (Lee, 1989). Lee calls the leader a catalyst; Bolman and Deal (1991) use the word facilitator. In both cases, the focus of the role is not to get what the leader wants, but to empower others to achieve their own organizational vision and goals. As facilitator/catalyst, the leader is able to foster high degrees of ownership and commitment to institutional objectives, and tasks of organizational renewal can be more easily accomplished.

The volatile and challenging environment at the close of this century requires community colleges to have effective strategic planning processes that are characterized by a high level of participation of the stakeholders. This mandate is clear but the implementation of such a process is not so clear. How will community colleges approach strategic planning to achieve this high level of participation? Is it possible to design a process that would be effective in encouraging participation at all levels of a community college organization? How can a process be developed to meet the diverse needs of the various stakeholders in a community college? What obstacles would this organization need to overcome in this evolutionary process? What would be the response of the stakeholders asked to be involved in such a process? What would be their motivation to participate? The answer to these questions will take extensive research.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of participants involved in one community college's strategic planning process in which faculty, administrators, and staff at all levels of the organization were encouraged to participate. In this case study, the researcher followed a community college through a 3-year cycle of planning. The following questions were central to the investigation.

1. What did participants value in a participatory strategic planning process?
2. What did participants find to be a hindrance to participation in this strategic planning process?

3. What strategies encouraged and sustained participation in this strategic planning process?

The data for this case study were gathered using a variety of methodologies. I served as a participant-observer over the time period of Fall 1992 to Spring 1995, and served on the Northwest Community College Strategic Planning Council. This study incorporates the formal evaluation processes conducted by the Strategic Planning Council (SPC). The data were collected through direct observation, focus group interviews, analysis of institutional documents, and a pen and paper questionnaire.

DEFINITIONS

Ethnography: A form of interpretive research concerned with interpreting and accurately describing the meaning that research participants give to the reality around them (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Institutional effectiveness: The quality improvement efforts at community colleges have been popularized under the heading *institutional effectiveness*. The term has become an umbrella that encompasses a host of related concepts, including accountability, student outcomes, assessment, and various measures of efficiency and vitality (Kreider, 1988).

Learning organization: An organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future (Senge, 1990); one that is able to learn through double-loops, i.e., has the ability to remain open to changes in the environment and the ability to challenge operating assumptions in a most fundamental way (Morgan, 1986).

Staff: In this study, the word staff refers to the full-time employees of Northwest Community College. NWCC staff refers to the combination of three groups: administrators, faculty, and support staff.

Staff perception: The insights, as self-reported, by paid personnel via focus groups and written surveys of the meaning of their experience participating in strategic planning processes at NWCC.

Strategic planning: Describes a type of planning that focuses on a matching process between external opportunities and trends, internal strengths and weaknesses, and personal values of staff and community (Shirley, 1983). Its primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution's future to anticipated changes in the environment in such a way that the acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, good will) is faster than the depletion of resources (Cope, 1987).

Participatory strategic planning: An approach to strategic planning that systemically encourages the greatest amount of involvement of staff in the process.

Systems thinking: Understanding the organization's components, how they are interdependent and interrelated, and how, in relation to one another, they form a dynamic whole. A systems view understands what energizes and nourishes the system, how the system uses its resources, and what it produces. It includes internally regulating systems, and the relationship of the system to its larger, outside environment (Wheatley, 1992).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY

In the past decade, business people and management scientists have developed innovative practices, including community building, worker empowerment, self-directed work teams, total quality management (TQM), and visioning. But at the slightest sign of difficulty, executives have often started circling the wagons and attempted to use the new paradigm approaches in old-fashioned ways (Sashkin & Kiser, 1993). During a time of change, the old ways of doing business may seem the only way to achieve this efficiency.

The change, or more properly, transition – a discontinuous, qualitative shift rather than merely a quantitative one – can be so frightening that we go back to what is comfortable or what has worked in the past, even though this approach to business is no longer appropriate. Research is needed to better understand these transitions and to reduce the fear of change. This case study is designed for that purpose. Change will mean conflict. The more that is understood about the reactions participants have to a change, the more confidence educational leaders will have to stay the course and not retreat to the old style of doing business.

John Bryson, in his book *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, focuses on participant thinking in the strategic planning process: "A key point to be emphasized again and again is that it is strategic 'thinking and acting' that are important, not strategic planning" (Bryson, 1988, p. 43). To understand whether an approach to strategic planning is effective or a hindrance, the individuals or participants must be asked about their perceptions of the process. This study will examine the perceptions of participants in a participatory strategic planning process. A better understanding of these perceptions should inform managers of elements that are necessary to develop improved processes for enhancing strategic thinking and informed action.

"Leadership is not simply a matter of what a leader does but of what occurs in the relationship between leaders and others. . . . Leaders both shape and are shaped by their constituents" (Bolman & Deal ,1991, p. 409). A basic assumption of this study is that the more understanding we have of the constituents and what they value in a participatory process, the more likely the process will become sustainable.

Cohen and Brawer (1994) emphasize the need for shared ownership in a well-developed goal setting process:

> Planning involves not only setting goals, but also finding the means to accomplish them. Planning includes developing a system arranged so that all involved feel a part of the process. The shared ownership of goals and policies is a motivation force for everyone from faculty to board members. (Cohen & Brawer, 1994, p. 476)

In order to develop an inclusive system, leaders must understand what participants find valuable in the process as well as what they find a hindrance. This feedback will be critical to the development of a culture in an organization that is committed to a participatory strategic planning process.

Lastly, an important aspect of this study lies in its long-term engagement. This investigation followed the NWCC Strategic Planning Council over a period of 3 years. The longevity of this study allowed the researcher to see themes as they developed over time and provided a deeper understanding of the perception of participants in a participatory strategic planning process.

DELIMITATION

This study is delimited in several ways. First, the study is delimited to one community college: NWCC in suburban Oregon. It is delimited to one 3-year period from the Fall of 1992 to Spring 1995. The study is further delimited to the perceptions of participants concerning the planning process in which they participated.

LIMITATIONS

Any study has limitations inherent in its design. In this study, there exist intrinsic concerns surrounding the ethnography process itself. Qualitative research, in-depth interviewing specifically, is vulnerable to the personal biases of any researcher and can be shaped by his or her perspectives and theoretical positions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1987). I must acknowledge that my perspective is unique to me and different from my colleagues. I began this study as a new employee at NWCC. My initial interest was to better understand the system of the community college and how to become an effective manager. As I found no orientation to this system, I sought to understand it through alternative means of research. My most recent professional endeavor had been in the delivery of health and safety education programs with the American Red Cross. The work of the American Red Cross is delivered through volunteers following a template of national guidelines. The organization is mission driven: "to save lives and reduce human suffering." Every chapter of the American Red Cross is organized to meet the needs of its community, fulfilling this mission where it is needed. The organization is an open system, whereby for every paid staff person there are 1,000 volunteers. The American Red Cross is truly a system: the chapters can only be understood in terms of its dynamic interaction with the national organization; work is in flexible projects; the volunteer staff are multiskilled and continually adapting; motivation for the volunteers is based on the connectedness to the whole organization. I have been a Red Cross volunteer for more than 25 years. As a manager for 8 years in this system, I was responsible for strategic planning, operational planning, marketing, and volunteer staff development. My formal education has been in Psychology (Bachelor of Arts) and Management (Master of Science).

The researcher also acknowledges the limitation of language. The meaning a researcher gives to a word or concept may not be that of the participant. Meaning may be to some degree, "a function of the participants' interactions with the researcher" (Seidman, 1991, p. 16).

Since this study was limited to a single organization, comparing and contrasting findings within several sites was prohibited. Caution was used in generalizing the findings of this research to the population as a whole. "It is virtually impossible to imagine any human behavior that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 62). This idea was also presented by Borg, Gall, and Gall (1993), and Patton (1987). Consequently, it is very difficult to generalize human behavior and the meaning humans associate to their behavior. This becomes even more complex when one considers the associated difficulty of generalizing human behavior outside of the context in which it occurs. Potential users of this research should examine the methods used and the persons studied before applying the findings to another situation.

Finally, this study was not concerned with the overall effectiveness of strategic planning but is limited to the observation and evaluation of the process by one set of participants. This study sought to understand how these individuals became involved in and committed to a participatory strategic planning process and to discover the advantages and disadvantages of such a process from the participant's point-of-view.

OUTLINE OF THE REMAINDER OF THE DISSERTATION

The literature review in Chapter II is divided into two sections. The first section is concerned with new paradigms for management and the concept of a learning organization. It contrasts a mechanistic model of patriarchal organizations with the open-systems model of learning organizations. The second section deals with strategic planning and institutional effectiveness practices across the country as well as planning documents from Oregon community colleges.

Chapter III describes the qualitative research methodology used in this study. Chapter IV is the story of NWCC's strategic planning process. The story is developed from field observations, focus groups, an institutional paper survey, and supporting documents gathered over a 3-year period. Chapter V presents conclusions from this study, hypotheses for further research, and recommendations for the strategic planning processes in a community college.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This case study inquiry incorporates and blends two theoretical threads: systems thinking and institutional effectiveness. The foundations of systems thinking are presented in this chapter. The application of the systems thinking model is supported from examples in business and leadership. A definition and discussion of institutional effectiveness follows. These two theoretical elements form a framework for a discussion of strategic planning and strategic thinking. The application of this framework is explored through a review of the literature on shared governance practices, participation models, and implementation of participatory strategic planning models.

A NEW PARADIGM: FROM MECHANISTIC MODEL TO SYSTEMS THINKING MODEL

In this paper, the word paradigm is used in a precise way. The dictionary defines paradigm as, "a pattern, example, or model" (Gove, 1961, p. 1635). But with the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, paradigm came to be equated with those fundamental assumptions made about the nature of the world, particularly in the physical sciences. In fact, Kuhn (1970) said that a field is not a science unless it has a paradigm. Furthermore, a scientific revolution occurs when there is a paradigm shift – that is, when the old set of assumptions no longer holds true and a small band of scientists develops a new paradigm, a new set of assumptions, that are then validated and applied until yet another change seems necessary (Kuhn, 1970). This definition has been applied to management science as well, where behavioral scientists seek to describe their work using models and patterns from the physical sciences.

The current dominant paradigm in the sciences, the mechanistic paradigm, is based on *objective* knowledge developed from such methods as experimentation and controlled observation. All truth, according to this paradigm, exists outside of the human individual. Hence the phrase, "I'll believe it when I see it," is common in our culture. We have depended on outer knowledge and experts for truth. This dependence on outer knowledge and the senses is the socially approved basis for western culture behavior and opinions, whether or not we are engaged in the sciences.

As the 20th century has developed, discovery after discovery in physics has depicted a far different world than the one most members of society assume as they go through everyday life. Quantum physics has led to a system that reveals Newton's predictions to be only approximations, holding true only in such large scale events as the movements of planets. In the world of the very small or very fast, Newtonian mechanics are completely wrong (Kuhn, 1970; Wheatley, 1992; Capra, 1996). While the world of the mechanistic science consists of large, solid objects with empty space between them, the world of the new science of systems thinking is a place made up of vibrations and energy waves. What appears to be solid matter is actually the mutual vibration of particles so small and so relatively far apart that they dwarf astronomers' pronouncements of the distances between planets and galaxies. The revolutionary implication of Einstein's simple equation $E=mc^2$ is that there is no true distinction between energy and matter (Capra, 1996; Kuhn, 1970; Wheatley, 1992) (see Table 1).

Newton posited that everything in the world is in a process of entropy or breakdown. Ilya Prigogine, 1977 Nobel prize winner in chemistry has shown in his study of the polymer process of crystallization that the universe is in a constant process of creation, rather than breakdown. This mirrors the social systems that people must face in a time of transition, when chaos eventually leads to higher levels of order (Ray & Rinzler, 1993).

TABLE 1

CHANGING SCIENTIFIC PARADIGMS

	Old Mechanistic	New Systems Thinking
Fate of Living Systems	Entropy	Self-organizing
Desired State	Equilibrium	Dynamic change
Structures	Man-made	Inherent, unfolding
Order	Structures	Information
Information	Closely managed	People self-organize around it

Note: Adapted from Wheatley (1992).

One tenet of the emerging systems thinking paradigm is that consciousness is causal, that the inner experience of individuals, including intuition, emotions, creativity, and spirit, are vastly more important than the world of the senses alone. "In fact, the messages we get from our senses about reality are ultimately affected by our inner consciousness. As the ancient sage put it, 'The world is as you see it'" (Ray, 1993, p. 4). Scientific discoveries, coupled with the experience and yearnings of many nonscientists, has created a new view of the world that is characterized by wholeness, connection, and the primacy of inner wisdom and inner authority. In everyday parlance, this means we have moved from, "I'll believe it when I see it," to, "I'll see it when I believe it" (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The fundamental assumption of the new paradigm is that our inner knowledge directs the way the world is going to look to us and the way we respond to it. We are beginning to realize that if we do not believe in something, it does not exist – no matter how much data is thrown in front of us (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

Einstein is often quoted as saying, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 5). Wheatley, an organizational development consultant, has examined how our world view, and therefore the structure of our organizations, is linked to our Newtonian images of the universe, which is in turn based on the mechanistic paradigm.

> We manage by separating things into parts, we believe that influence occurs as a result of forces exerted from one person to another, we engage in complex planning for a world that we keep expecting to be predictable, and we search continually for better methods of objectively perceiving the world. (Wheatley, 1992, p. 6)

Table 2 is adapted from a lecture given by Margaret Wheatley (1993) at Oregon State University. It is an application of the new paradigm in organizations. These characteristics are the foundations for the systems thinking model for organizations.

TABLE 2

THE NEW PARADIGM IN ORGANIZATIONS

Mechanistic Model Matter Composed of Things Concept	Systems Thinking Model Things Only Exist in Relationship Concept
The world is like a clockwork machine.	The world is a great web, with ebb and flow.
Break apart the whole to understand.	Parts can only be understood in terms of the dynamic interaction of the whole.
Knowledge is discrete.	Knowledge is interconnected and dynamic.
Organizations are a set of functions.	Organizations structured as whole systems.
Work is completed by people assigned to roles.	Work is structured as flexible projects.
People are replaceable cogs.	People are multiskilled and continually adapting.
Motivation is based on force.	Motivation is based on connectedness to the whole.
Change is a troubling exception.	Change is all there is.

Systems thinking, the new paradigm with its emphasis on whole systems and human connections, becomes clearer when it is contrasted with the old paradigm in which much of everyday business is still conducted. The old paradigm is best typified by Newton's mechanistic clockwork metaphor. Even though science has rejected this view as unrealistic in many ways, our culture and our business strategies remain largely based on this thinking. Since the industrial revolution we have thought of organizations as machines. We set up clockworks of organizations that function by rigid hierarchies, with people seen as replaceable components who work on the basis of orders from above. Those orders come from managers who have been taught that individual values and intuition are to be scorned, that rationality based on data is the only way to make a decision, that management is defined as "getting things done through people," as if people were the parts that get in the way rather than contributors to success who simultaneously grow from their contribution. By contrast, the new emphasis on human consciousness in the paradigm of systems thinking elevates the importance of people and includes their subjective experiences in the decision-making process. Leaders in the systems thinking paradigm will honor inner wisdom or authority in addition to outer impersonal forces. They value each person and, as one executive has expressed it, "do business as if people mattered." Robert Haas, CEO of Levi Strauss and Company, has commented that:

> The most visible differences between the corporation of the future and its present-day counterpart will not be the products they make or the equipment they use – but who will be working, why they will be working, and what work will mean to them. (Ray & Rinzler, 1993, p. 4)

RECONCEPTUALIZING LEADERSHIP IN THE SYSTEMS THINKING MODEL

Despite the increasing popularity of cultural theories of organizations and leadership, most works on leadership are based on the belief that organizations are objective and rational entities, separate from ourselves, waiting to be discovered (Greenfield, 1980). This view informs bureaucratic, collegial, and political models insofar as these models are concerned with the instrumental value of structures, consultation, and power. Thinking about leadership is still predominantly a product of the view of organizations as rational entities pursuing clearly delineated goals in a linear fashion. Consequently, leadership is viewed as an objective act in which leaders influence the activities of followers through the display of specific traits, or the display of power, or the display of specific behaviors.

Recent scholarship on the moral development of women merits consideration as a theoretical base for the reconceptualization of leadership as a collective and interactive act. This is because this theoretical base is grounded in the experience of women whose backgrounds differs dramatically from the norm of leadership, which is male dominated and heavily individualistic. Blackmore (1989) has shown how this scholarship on women's moral development can be used to reconstruct the conventional model of leadership. Rather than conceiving of leadership as unidimensional and as posited within one individual, Blackmore has advocated a view of power which is "multi-dimensional and multi-directional" (p. 94), drawing others into the center rather than subordinating, marginalizing, or excluding them. Blackmore has asserted a new view of leadership that builds on the following beliefs:

> Leadership can be practiced in different contexts by different people and need not be merely equated with formal roles. (p. 94)
>
> Leadership looks to empower others rather than have power over others. (p. 94)

> Leadership is concerned with communitarian and collective activities and values. Thus, the process of leading is both educative and conducive to democratic process. (p. 94)
>
> Leadership, and the power that accompanies it, may be redefined as the ability to act with others to do things that could not be done by an individual alone. (p. 123)

Organizations may be better understood as a human collective. This human collective inevitably has an organizational chart with boxes and arrows showing who is in charge of what and who reports to whom. But within those boxes are people: untidily thinking, mind-changing, goal-shifting, varying-daily people (Bensimon, 1994). The perspective that feminist research has brought to the study of organizations suggests a view of the organization as an association of people with whom each administrator must empathize, interact, and collaborate, and that this will lead to a more productive environment.

Systems Thinking and Institutional Effectiveness in Community Colleges

One of the major changes characterizing the 1980s in America was an intensified, almost obsessive, concern for quality in American businesses. As this concern spread to educational systems, administrators at all academic levels began to develop strategies for assessing and improving the quality of their institutions. The quality improvement efforts in our nation's business community was popularized under the heading "institutional effectiveness" in America's community colleges. In the community college, institutional effectiveness has become an umbrella term that encompasses a host of related concepts, including accountability, student outcomes, assessment, and various measures of efficiency and vitality (Kreider, 1988).

Since the concept of institutional effectiveness is relatively new to the community college, there are very few well- researched practices to use as guidelines. Organizational assessment is moving more in the direction of a requirement, particularly by accrediting agencies and other policy making bodies such as state and federal government. Individual institutions are generally permitted to determine their own methods for demonstrating effectiveness. One school of thought focuses on efforts to determine institutional effectiveness and are built on a foundation of quantitatively measuring outcomes. This is an area where business and financial administrators lend expertise. Even though their experience may be limited to financial analysis, such analysis can be adapted to assessing other aspects of institutional performance (Lorenzo, 1994). The quantitative school of thought tends to emphasize a mechanistic model. Cohen and Brawer (1994) argue that this mechanistic model of assessing institutional effectiveness has its limitations in community colleges.

> The introduction of concepts drawn for managing business corporations seems untoward in an institution that has open-ended goals. Colleges are more like religious organizations than they are like businesses; they help people toward a better life. To introduce the rhetoric of achievement indicators, customer focus, and quality control is to introduce a type of thinking that ill fits the sensibilities of most of the people within the organizations. Attained learning, degrees earned, and new jobs entered may be measured, but beyond these gross indicators, the process is the product. The staff have never accepted outcome measures as indicators in college worth. There is no profit, no bottom line. Knowledge is not a consumption item. (p. 20)

Most institutional effectiveness literature addresses a catalog of effectiveness indicators and discusses their relative importance. What is lacking in these otherwise helpful considerations is attention to development of the effective organization as an integrated system. Missionary zeal, enthusiastically applied to any one effectiveness indicator, will probably cause burnout if there is no consideration of the indicator's fit within the total organizational system (Gratton & Walleri, 1992). American community colleges are organizations which remain to some extent rooted in the traditional university model. This model consists of a hierarchy of leadership, top-down processing, fixed boundaries, and competition among the various departments and disciplines. Even when steps are taken in the interest of *broad-based planning*, *quality management*, or *collegiality*, frequently no fundamental change occurs in how the organization is viewed or how it functions as a system and what that means to the interrelated parts.

A systems view is built on an understanding of an organization's components, how they are interdependent and interrelated, and how they form a dynamic whole in relation to each other. A systems view understands what energizes and nourishes the system, how the system uses its resources, and what the system produces. A systems view includes internally regulating systems, and the relationship of the system to its larger, outside environment. All of these factors need to be understood, managed, and effectively linked and integrated if the total organization is to be effective (Wheatley, 1992).

In *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*, the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges (1988) has directly linked the vitality of teaching and learning processes with "energy . . . pumped into the community, continuously renewing and revitalizing the institution" (p. 5). The Commission has focused on teaching as being the heartbeat of the community college educational mission. Further, the commission has pointed out, as did the CEOs in Deegan's (1992) study, that on many campuses there is a "feeling of burnout and fatigue among faculty, a loss of vitality, that weakens the quality of teaching" (Commission on the Future of Community Colleges, 1988, p. 5). One can conclude that if teaching and learning form the heartbeat of the institution, a staff lacking in vitality will result in a deficient organization. The Commission's language implies that a systems view is essential to effectiveness or fulfillment of purpose. It also puts the teaching staff at the heart of the community college system as the agent for transformation of energy within that system (Gratton & Walleri, 1992).

Richardson and Wolverton (1994) have shed an interesting light on the relationship between effective educational practices used by faculty and faculty participation in professional development and governance opportunities. It is a complex study which demonstrates a need to look at organizations as whole systems and how the parts can only be understood in terms of the dynamic interaction of the whole. It is a study that demonstrates the need to measure institutional effectiveness of the whole system and not to focus on isolated effectiveness indicators.

Richardson and Wolverton (1994) incorporated information on effective educational practices into a study that went to faculty in a random, stratified, national sample of 52 community colleges. More than 67% of faculty returned usable surveys. Faculty members in some institutions reported significantly higher levels of effective behaviors than their counterparts in other institutions. To find out why, Richardson and Wolverton invited 12 community colleges from across the country to participate in case studies. Survey results indicated that faculty performance differed significantly among the 12 institutions, and half or more of the differences could be explained by participation in professional development and governance opportunities. The case studies offer a contextual explanation of how and why these differences occurred.

1. Higher-performing institutions had cultures that emphasized student achievement and brought people together. While these cultures in some ways tolerated a lack of involvement beyond the classroom, they did not encourage it. Among the lower performing institutions, the presence of competing cultures and formal safeguards (in the

form of comprehensive collective bargaining agreements or board policies) allowed or even encouraged faculty disengagement.

2. Higher-performing institutions expected more from their faculty and defined their roles to encompass a broader range of responsibilities. By contrast, lower-performing institutions defined faculty responsibilities almost exclusively in terms of meeting classes and keeping posted office hours.

3. Faculty were evaluated more frequently in higher-performing institutions. Rewards and recognition were tied to the evaluation process and reflected values faculty and administrators shared. In lower-performing institutions, evaluations for continuing faculty occurred at lengthy intervals and were typically unrelated to rewards or recognition. In these institutions, faculty were described as "very oriented to minimum standards."

4. While all case-study institutions used some form of combined department and division structure, higher-performing institutions supported departments as places where faculty could gain leadership experience and incubate innovative ideas. Among lower-performing colleges, departments were tolerated or served as bastions of faculty autonomy.

5. Creative leadership was required to offset the effects of bureaucracies in multicampus districts. The many demands of large and complex district administrative staffs had the same deadening effects on creativity and vitality of community college faculty that they had in public schools.

6. Lower-performing districts had more extensive and complex governance arrangements, but faculty in higher-performance institutions were more likely to participate in governance. The complex structures seem to be better predictors of a lack of trust than of effective faculty involvement.

7. Professional development opportunities for faculty members in higher-performing institutions were linked in systematic ways to institutional priorities. In several lower-performance districts, faculty had no sense of priorities. Many were described as angry or alienated (Richardson & Wolverton, 1994).

Overall, in higher-performance community colleges, arrangements for involving faculty in decision-making provided credible opportunities for both faculty and administrators to influence outcomes. In lower-performing institutions, administrators persuaded, influenced, supported, or, in some instances, confronted, but they did not seem to lead or develop any sort of shared vision of what the institution hoped to achieve.

The dilemma of staff and organizational vitality has been treated extensively in the literature. Bland and Schmitz (1988) reported a high frequency of references to the relationship between renewed, vital, developing faculty and the capacity of the institution to fulfill its instructional mission. They indicated that "vitality implies a larger scope and systems-level remedies" (p. 198). Finally, Bland and Schmitz (1988) emphasized that the most comprehensive development program would be one that "integrates individual, departmental and institutional strategies" (p. 220). In short, colleges are recommended to consider and treat the whole, not merely the parts.

In his classic contribution to organizational development, Argyris (1970) espoused the essential importance of valid information made freely available to the organization (the system). The flow of information, like the flow of life-giving blood, is critical to a system's ability to self-regulate. Quite simply, according to Argyris, the system's clients cannot make informed choices, commit to a course of thinking or action, or feel any ownership of a process and outcome unless valid information is present. Argyris further emphasized that learning which comes from informed choice-making should contribute to a theoretical base of principles for future application within the organization. Argyris' ideas about the system's use of information creates the conceptual foundation for the learning organization (Senge, 1990) - organizations in which people, through knowledge, understanding, and learning, increasingly expand their capability to shape the future. The learning organization is built on the principle of an integrated systems view of organizations. Understanding only a part - practicing departmental separatism, following management trends for their own sake, preserving top-down thinking - results in transient success and demoralized, uninvolved staff (Gratton & Walleri, 1992).

Learning Organizations as a Model of Systems Thinking

Community colleges are between eras, in a transitional position that parallels the position that society as a whole finds itself in. The growth era for community colleges is fading; the vitality era is emerging. The key concern for the next decade will not be whether community colleges can survive but whether they can continue to be vital to the students, communities, and employers they serve. A vital, anticipatory, active, high-performance approach to shaping the future must be found or community colleges will decline into a passive repetition of outmoded services. Even more so than in the past, community college leaders are in a position to create the future through the choices they make. And choose they must. As the pace of technological, economic, political, and social change continues to accelerate, community college leaders must choose among the external and internal stimuli that demand attention and analysis. They must choose between alternative scenarios for the development of the college in response to these stimuli, and they must decide how the limited human, physical, and financial resources of the college can best be developed and allocated (Myran, 1983).

Arie de Geus (1988), Shell corporation's recently retired Coordinator of Group Planning, said that continuous adaptation and growth in a changing business environment depend on "institutional learning, which is the process whereby management teams change their shared mental models of the company, their markets, and their competitors. For this reason, we think of planning as learning and of corporate planning as institutional learning" (p. 73). At the heart of the *learning organization* is a shift in perspective, from seeing individuals as separate from the world to seeing individuals as connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something *out there* to seeing how the actions of individuals create the problems they experience. A learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. The basic meaning of a learning organization is an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future (Senge, 1990).

Assessing Institutional Effectiveness

With this theoretical framework in place, let us now revisit institutional effectiveness in the community college. Assessing institutional effectiveness has become a primary focus of the community college movement (Walleri, Seybert, & Cosgrove, 1992). This has come about in response to external accountability demands and as a mechanism for stimulating internal improvements. The policy statement of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, formerly American Association of Community and Junior Colleges) on institutional effectiveness captures the theme of this study through the connection made between a dynamic staff and organizational development program, and valid institutional research to support strategic planning and program improvement. At its 1992 national convention, the AACC adopted a "Policy Statement on Institutional Effectiveness" (see Appendix A). In this policy statement a college's mission is placed at the core of any institutional effectiveness program. However, the mission statement is only the beginning of the process of establishing an institutional effectiveness program. An ongoing staff and organizational development program based on a systems view is an essential precondition (AACC, 1992).

> Any effort to assess and improve institutional effectiveness must begin with the faculty, staff, administration and governing board of the college. No community college can be truly effective without vital and committed personnel. Community colleges should strive to promote professional development and a dynamic organizational culture. This can only be accomplished within an environment of trust and honesty, both in institutional processes and interpersonal relations. (AACC, 1992, p. 1)

Another key ingredient to an institutional effectiveness program is a solid institutional research program (AACC, 1992) designed to be fully integrated with and available to the organization.

> Board and administration commitment to an "open" decision-making process which is nourished by valid, reliable and timely information lays the foundation for an involved and active faculty and staff. Such an internal culture cultivates respect and acts as a catalyst for empowering faculty and staff. This provides a solid base which allows staff to focus on student success and the development of partnerships with external groups. (AACC, 1992, p. 1)

Systems Thinking, Innovation, and Entrepreneurial Management

Today's giant institutions, both public and private, are not, by and large, organized for innovation. Their systems and processes are all oriented toward incremental improvement – doing better what they are doing already. In the United States, the pressure of innumerable social and governmental constraints on corporate activities, most notably the proliferation of government regulations during the 1960s and 1970s, has put a premium on the talent for adaptation and has reduced further the incentive to innovate. Advocates of bold and ambitious strategies too often find themselves on the sidelines, labeled as losers, while rewards go to those more skilled at working within the system. This is especially true in mature industries where actions and ideas often move in narrow grooves, forcing out innovators. Conversely, venture capital groups tend to attract the flexible, adaptive minds.

A recent milestone in the evolution of management theory has come from a series of books that emphasize entrepreneurial management concepts. Entrepreneurship, which was a dirty word in the education profession in the 1960s and a risky word in the 1970s, began to emerge in the business literature of such writers as Peters and Waterman (1982), Keller (1983), and Deal and Kennedy (1982). By the mid-1980s, a number of books specifically called for entrepreneurship, and a theme emerged. Thus authors such as Drucker (1985), Pinchot (1985), and Naisbilt and Aburdene (1985) wrote books calling for entrepreneurship management in both profit and nonprofit organizations.

One fundamental of entrepreneurial management in education is the need to create the proper climate or organizational culture, a culture conducive to developing awareness of opportunities for entrepreneurship. This means attention to organizational structure, funding rewards, and incentives; proper balance between control and freedom; and an active search for entrepreneurial opportunities (Drucker, 1985; Pinochet, 1985). According to Deegan (1994), for an organization to be capable of innovation, it has to create a structure that allows people to be entrepreneurial. It has to devise relationships that center on entrepreneurship, and it has to make sure that its rewards and incentives, personnel decisions, and policies all reward the right entrepreneurial behavior rather than punish it (Deegan, 1994).

Deegan (1994) continues to stress that there is a critical aspect of entrepreneurial management in education, the need for an acceptance of the value of the long-term versus short-term thinking. The quick fix approach often does not permit much time to pass before new projects are discarded. Additionally, there is the need to ensure that projects are systematically evaluated. Too often innovation and entrepreneurship are described only on the up side, that is, as projects are developing. Educators need to hear more about what works, what did not work, and why (Deegan, 1994). There is much to be gained from sharing information about both successes and failures, and colleges should develop systematic evaluation programs to ensure that people learn from the past in order to improve the future.

Given the evolution of management theory described in the preceding section and the pressing problems of managing higher education institutions in the 1990s, William Deegan (1992) conducted a national survey in the spring of 1990 to determine the use and impact of key entrepreneurial management concepts in American community colleges. Of 311 surveys mailed, 167 useable responses were returned. An important issue that these data reveal concerns the gap between the amount of strategic planning taking place institution-wide (89%) and the amount of strategic planning occurring at the department level (39%). These data suggest that much strategic planning is not being translated into action beyond top management levels, an issue that individual colleges would do well to examine as they try to determine the impact and effectiveness of their own strategic planning efforts.

In the Deegan (1992) study, community college presidents were asked to rate the impact of the various management tactics used in their institutions. Institution-wide strategic planning was rated as very successful by only 34% of the colleges using it, and departmental level strategic planning was rated very successful by only 29% of the colleges who used it. This data suggest that strategic planning, at the college-wide or the departmental level, does not appear to be as successful as much of the literature would lead readers to expect it to be.

The Success of Strategic Planning

Meredith (1993) reported that there is a mixed response on the success of strategic planning at U.S. colleges and universities. At some institutions, planning has transformed the life, financial strength, and direction of the school. At other institutions, planning has been inconclusive, and forgettable. What makes the difference? Why are some colleges able to agree on new priorities for action and metamorphose while others bicker and are unable to decide on or act upon decisions to improve themselves? When Meredith compiled a list of the top 10 solved problems and top 10 unsolved problems, four items appeared on both lists: linking planning to budgeting, creating more effective facilities planning, doing proactive rather than reactive planning, and integrating/connecting the various kinds of campus planning. This finding has confirmed the Deegan (1992) research concerning CEOs' use of management techniques, namely that planning is not as well integrated as it should be in the systems approach to management.

"Lots of Effort, But Do They Say Anything? Are Mission Statements Worthwhile?" (Newsom & Hayes, 1990) is the title of a small study that was conducted to learn whether colleges were creating pointed mission statements from which specific objectives and lines of activity could be derived. Most devotees of academic planning believe that a mission statement should be a declaration of the special purposes of an institution and the people that it intends to serve, that a mission statement is a declaration of the institution's reason for being. Newsom and Hayes (1990) discovered that a dismaying number of university mission statements do very little to focus activity. Mission statements seemed to represent a compromise designed to offend no one and at best to limit a few options. In short, these statements were not the kind of beacon one would hope for as a guide for planning activities. Of the colleges surveyed, 91% said their mission statement was located in their catalog, faculty handbook, and in key documents for the board of trustees. Eighty-four percent indicated they had reevaluated their mission in the past five years, and 70% said they had rewritten theirs. However in response to the question "Was the mission statement used, and if so, how?" most did not list any use. Most of the mission statements are vague, evasive, or simply rhetorical, lacking both specificity and a clear purposes.(Newsom & Hayes, 1990).

These studies may indicate that the application of a new paradigm is not as simple as it may appear. Applying systems thinking to established structured organizations is a paradox in itself. Research is needed to better understand such transitions and to reduce the fear of change. This study is designed for that purpose.

Strategic Planning Defined

Strategic planning emerged in the 1980s as an approach for correcting the weaknesses of traditional comprehensive planning efforts. Based on an environmental scan of external conditions and an analysis of an organization's strengths and weaknesses, strategic planning attempts to balance short-term and long-term goals while adapting to realistic opportunities. Strategic planning is premised on the articulation of measurable objectives combined with processes of evaluation and assessment. These attributes have made strategic planning the new prevailing paradigm for organizational management. When successful, strategic planning is an integral part of all organizational activities, providing guidance on a day-to-day basis in addition to direction for the achievement of long-term goals (Walleri, 1992).

As defined by Olsen and Eadie (1982) strategic planning is:

> A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it. At its best, strategic planning requires broad scale information

> gathering, an exploration of alternatives, and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. Strategic planning can facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, and foster orderly decision making and successful implementation. (p. 4)

Cope (1987), focusing on the essential elements of strategic planning, offered the following explanation:

> Strategic planning is an open systems approach to steering an enterprise over time through uncertain environmental waters. It is a proactive problem-solving behavior directed externally at conditions in the environment and a means to find a favorable competitive position in a continual competition for resources. Its primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution's future to anticipated changes in the environment in such a way that the acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, good will) is faster than the depletion of resources. (p. 3)

This definition, because it emphasizes the acquisition of resources, gets to a key point about the bottom line reason for strategic planning: prosperity. Simply put, strategic planning is what an enterprise does to position itself favorably relative to the resources in its environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Yuchtman & Seashore, 1967).

Table 3 contrasts strategic planning as it has been in the past with a mechanistic model, with strategic planning as it can be when employing the systems thinking model.

The differences revealed in Table 3 suggest that under the new paradigm of systems thinking, the focus of strategic planning is on the external environment, and is oriented toward institutional changes directed by a vision of future states. It is oriented toward finding synergy, wholeness, effectiveness, and patterns in decision-making as people within the institution use qualitative information to inform their intuitive judgments. The left part of the model shown in Table 3 emphasizes mission, environment, the enterprise's strengths, and key success factors. The key success factors are what an institution must do relative to its resource-providing ecosystem to be successful in fulfilling its mission with prosperity. Taken together, the key success factors contain most of the elements ascribed to vision.

TABLE 3

DIFFERENTIATING STRATEGIC PLANNING FROM OTHER FORMS OF PLANNING

Strategic Planning (Systems Model)	Other Planning (Mechanistic Model)
Emphasis on the environment	Emphasis on the enterprise
Oriented toward change	Emphasis on stability
Vision directed	Follows a blueprint
Inductive and integrated	Deductive and analytical
Proactive	Reactive
Emphasis on doing the right things	Emphasis on doing things right
Art	Science
Open and external focus	Closed and internal focus
Anticipates changes	Extrapolates from the past
Current decisions based on looking toward the future	Current decisions based on looking from the present
Entrepreneurial and action oriented, even when there is ambiguity	Inaction when there is ambiguity
Emphasis on innovation and creativity	Emphasis on the tried and tested
Synergistic	Univariate
Enterprise's environment and context are primary determinants of strategy/choices/direction	Enterprise's strengths and weaknesses are the primary determinant of strategy/choices/direction
Emphasis on opinions, intuition, and the qualitative	Emphasis on facts and the quantitative
Orientation toward effectiveness	Orientation toward efficiency
Patterns are in stream of decisions	Decisions are made and carried out

Note: Adapted from Meredith, Cope, and Lenning (1987).

The strategic planning process cannot be a static or bureaucratic exercise, rather it must be a dynamic and evolving approach to creating vision and solving problems. At its best, it has a tradition of being a participatory and information-rich process, engendering community dialogue and being shaped by the outcomes of that dialogue. Under these conditions, strategic planning can assist in forging better links with other institutional processes and in clarifying the vision guiding the college toward a designed and desired future.

As Naisbilt (1982) suggested, planners must develop an ability to anticipate the future. He argued that, in this period of rapid transition from the industrial to the information era, we must learn to draw lessons from the anticipation of future conditions and trends, just as we have traditionally drawn on lessons from the past.

Application of the New Paradigm to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning has undergone an evolution in the last two decades from a prescriptive linear mechanistic tool to one that is more organic in nature. An emphasis on formal *rationality* has traditionally permeated the literature of planning. Denning (1973) contrasted the systematic with the haphazard, while Steiner (1969) argued that "plans can and should be, to the fullest possible extent, objective, factual, logical, and realistic in establishing objectives and devising means to obtain them" (p. 26). Similarly, Dror (1971) claimed that in the public sector, "planning is at present the most structured and professionalized mode of policy making [given its] explicit attention to internal consistency [and its] effort to supply structured rationality" (p. 78). Mitzenberg (1994) noted that formal rationality is rooted in analysis, not synthesis. Furthermore, strategic planning is characterized by the decompositional nature of analysis – reducing states and processes to their component parts. Thus the process is formally reductionist in nature. This may seem curious, given that the intention of planning is to integrate decisions. (Mitzenberg, 1994).

The key assumption underlying this old form of strategic planning is that analysis will produce synthesis: the decomposition of the process of strategy-making into a series of articulated steps, each carried out in specified sequence, will produce integrated strategies. This, in fact, is the old mechanistic assumption, the one that underlies the design of the manufacturing assembly line, itself a kind of machine of human steps. If every component is produced by the machine as specified and assembled in the order prescribed, an integrated product will appear at the end of the line. While this analogy underlies some of the fundamental thinking in the field of planning it has proved to be patently false. "Organizational strategies cannot be created by the logic used to assemble automobiles" (Mitzenberg, 1994, p. 134).

Kenichi Ohmae (1982) suggested in *Mind of the Strategist* that:

> Successful business strategies result not from rigorous analysis but from a particular state of mind . . . [wherein] insight and a consequent drive for achievement, often amounting to a sense of mission, fuel a thought process which is basically creative and intuitive rather than rational. Strategists do not reject analysis. Indeed they can hardly do without it. Great strategies, like great works of art or great scientific discoveries, call for technical mastery in the working out but originate in insights that are beyond the reach of conscious analysis. (p. 13)

Figure 1 is an illustration of Ohmae's (1982) description of strategic thinking as compared to mechanical thinking. The first model represents the mechanical systems thinking. This model breaks down the problem into elements. These elements are then rearranged to come to a new position. The elements remain intact. The second model strictly deals with intuition. Insight is the predominant theme here. Analysis is secondary. The strategic thinking model melds the use of intuition and analysis. The analysis is used only to stimulate the creative process, to test the ideas that emerge, to work out their strategic implications, or to ensure successful execution of high potential "wild" ideas that might otherwise never be implemented properly. The result is a unique arrangement to achieve the optimal results from each of the elements separately as well as when combined form a new perspective.

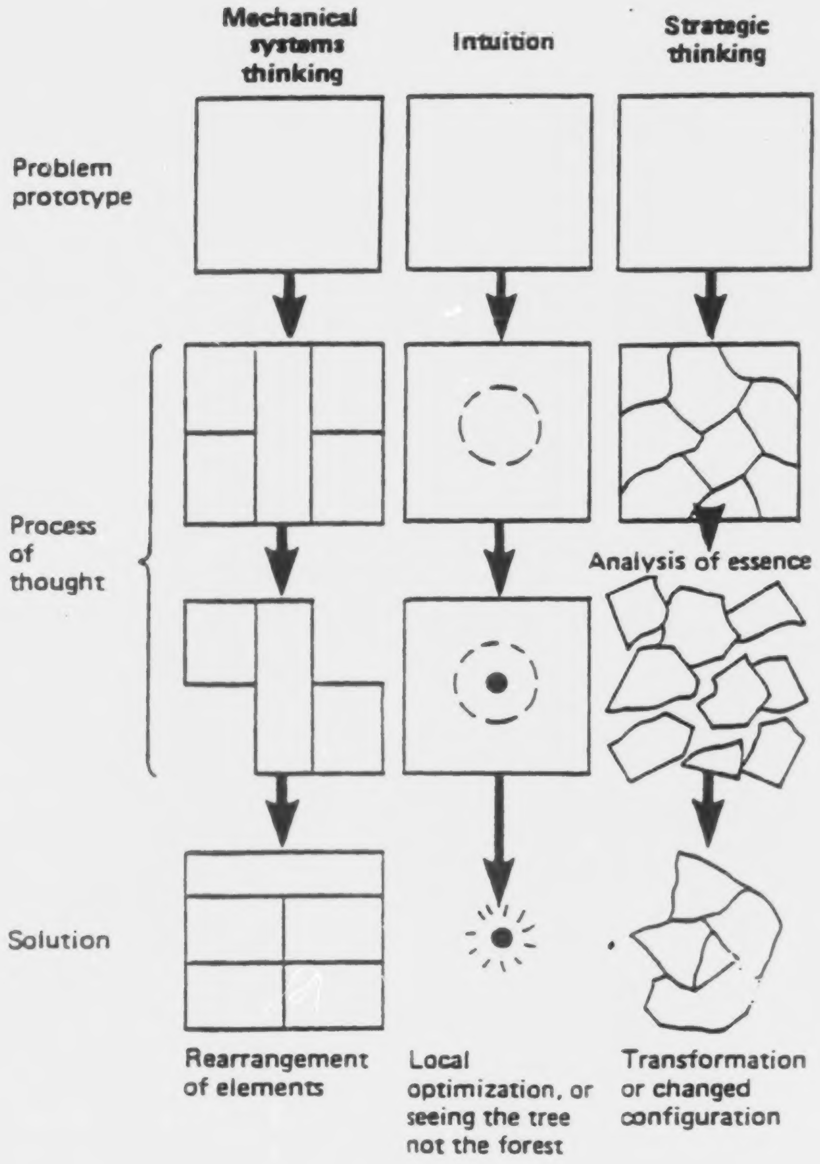

Mechanical systems thinking
Intuition
Strategic thinking
Problem prototype
Process of thought
Analysis of essence
Solution
Rearrangement of elements
Local optimization, or seeing the tree not the forest
Transformation or changed configuration

FIGURE 1

THREE KINDS OF THINKING PROCESSES

Because analysis is the critical starting point of strategic thinking, the strategic thinker, when faced with problems, trends, events, or situations that appear to constitute a harmonious whole, dissects the whole into its constituent parts. Then, having discovered the significance of these constituents, he reassembles them in a way calculated to maximize his advantage. However, phenomena and events in the real world do not always fit a linear model and so the most reliable means of dissecting a situation into its constituent parts and reassembling them in the desired pattern is not necessarily a step-by-step methodology. True strategic thinking thus contrasts sharply with the conventional mechanical systems approach based on linear thinking. It also contrasts with the approach that stakes everything on intuition, reaching conclusions without any real breakdown or analysis (see Figure 1) (Ohmae, 1982). Peter Drucker (1973) defined strategic planning as:

> The continuous process of making present entrepreneurial (risk-taking) decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of their futurity; organizing systematically the efforts needed to carry out these decisions; measuring the results of these decisions against the expectations through organized systematic feedback. (p. 125)

Drucker's (1973) definition emphasizes the need for planning to be seen as a process, and for the organization to be seen as a whole system. The strategic planning process demands an information flow to ensure that the decision-makers have the "greatest knowledge of futurity." As Argyris (1970) has stressed, a learning organization requires a flow of valid information to all participants so that informed decisions can be made. Planning then becomes a continuous process that supports learning through organized systematic feedback. Perry, Stott, and Smallwood (1993) defined this process as strategic improvising. It is a process much like jazz. It is flexible and reactive.

> Strategic improvising is designed to meet the challenges of today's global economy. It assumes that strategic responsibility needs to be widely distributed throughout organizations. It emphasizes putting strategic tools in

> the hands of self-directed team members. It promotes team-based actions and learning that will support strategic objectives. (p. 83)

This is a process that is best served by an integrated system of institutional research as well as organization and staff development. Cohen and Brawer (1989) concluded that:

> Planning involves not only setting goals, but also finding the means to accomplish them. Planning includes developing a system arranged so that all involved feel a part of the process. The shared ownership of goals and policies is a motivation force for everyone from faculty to board members. The system must safeguard against any party feeling slighted or overlooked. The days of the power struggle are gone. This is the age of cooperation, of seeing power as the ability to empower others. (p. 476)

Robert Shirley (1983) devised an especially helpful typology for dealing with strategic planning in the college or university. His four levels of strategy recognize that strategy is dealt with not only at the institutional level but by colleges, departments, and other subunits. This typology of Shirley's shows how strategy at the institutional level gets translated into strategy and into tactical and operational plans at the program level.

Institutional Strategy (Level 1) deals with matching environmental opportunities with internal strengths to determine basic mission, clientele, goals, programs/service mix, geographic service area, and comparative advantage. *Campus-wide Functional Strategies (Level 2)* deal with plans for finances, enrollment, admissions and recruitment, human resources, organization, and facilities to achieve the strategies outlined at the first level. *Program Strategies (Level 3)* are plans made by academic units in response to levels 1 and 2; the plans set strategic profiles, action priorities, and resource requirements. *Program-level Function Strategies (Level 4)* are plans made for admissions, curriculum, staffing, recruitment, and budget to achieve the program strategies established at level 3. Strategy moves up as well as down in an organization. Under Shirley's (1983) levels 3 and 4, departments often craft their own strategies and visions. They initiate as well as respond, especially in the absence of well-articulated institutional strategies.

The Oregon Community College Scene

Strategic planning is not an exact science. The differences between plans and the lack of plans within Oregon demonstrates this point. It appears planning is an organic process that needs to meet both the needs of the constituents and the salient environmental issues present.

In 1993, I contacted the 16 community colleges in Oregon requesting a copy of their strategic plan; 9 colleges responded with plans and 5 colleges reported they had no current plans. Table 4 is a detailed comparison of the plans collected. The plans varied in the time period covered from 1 to 10 years, 3 years being the most common length of time. The plans also varied in title. Three were labeled as strategic plans, other titles included long-range plan, institutional plan, and master plan focusing on facilities. Seven of the plans included mission statements. Eight of the plans had goals, ranging in number from 6 to 21. Five of the seven plans used some kind of background data to support the plan. Overall, there was little consistency in format, years covered, titles, or background information used to support the plans.

SHARED GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Shared Governance Theories

Community colleges have moved through stages of development from establishment to maturity. These stages have involved increasing pressure for involvement in governance (Alfred & Smydra, 1985; Deegan & Gollattscheck, 1985; O'Hara, 1990; Richardson, 1976; Slaughter & Broussal, 1986). These models of governance have been based on a number of different theories and have taken on a variety of forms. Following are a number of examples.

TABLE 4

STRATEGIC PLANS OF OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGES: COMPARISON GRID

College	Title	Years	Mission	Number of Goals	Objectives	Background Data
ACC	Long Range Plan	10	Yes	6	Yes	Demographics, economics, enrollment, budget
BCC	College Plan	1	Yes	7	Yes	National trends, local trends, resources
CCCC	Planning Document	3	Yes	11	Yes	External and internal assumptions, enrollment, FTE, history
NWCC	Institutional Plan	3	Yes	12	Yes	Assumptions, environmental conditions, outcome measurements, strategies, resources
DCC	Institutional Mission, Goals, and Objectives	N/A	Yes	20	No	None
ECC	Strategic Plan	N/A	Yes	13	Yes	Environmental Review
FCC	Strategic Plan	3	Yes	6	Yes	Environmental assessment, institutional assessment expenditure forecast, FTE history
GLCC	Master Plan	N/A	No	N/A	Yes	History of college and growth
HCC	Strategic Plan	3	No	21	Yes	Cost to Implement plan

Cohen and March (1974) espoused a theory of governance in which goals are ambiguous, and generous resources allow departments to go in different directions. Labeled "organized anarchy," decisions are the byproducts of unplanned activity involving problems, decision-makers, and preconceived solutions. Another model, proposed by Baldridge (1971), viewed colleges and universities as miniature political systems with interest-group dynamics and conflicts similar to those in other types of organizations. The key elements of this political model are fragmentation among internal interest groups, fluid and situational participation in decision-making, and vulnerability to the external environment. A model centered around the relationship of the institution and external environment is the coupling theory proposed by Weick (1976). How individuals conceptualize what is happening in the environment around an organization is critical to how the organization then responds or does not respond. The responses of individuals are determined by their position within the organization. Ranks and positions are not equal in their power or access to power; thus, it is the perceptions of key decision-makers that are critical to the operations of the organization. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of Likert (1967) in developing a continuum for governance running from autocracy, or rule by one, to participation, or rule by many. Likert believed that as institutions mature they operate on a cycle involving an inevitable transition from autocracy to participation in governance. In the parlance of modern day organizational theorists, Likert's theory can be broken down into subtheories labeled Theory X (autocratic supervision, allowing for a minimal group influence), Theory Y (democratic supervisory style, allowing for a considerable degree of group decision-making), and Theory Z (*pure* democracy, allowing for total group decision-making and for placing the supervisor in a rotational role with the staff).

As community colleges have grown larger and more complex, they have come to make use of all of these theories. For example, a community college president has the responsibility for positioning the organization with regard to the external environment and yet is at the top of a bureaucratic organization made up of layers of staff requiring coordination. Similarly, a department chair has a leadership role and yet is part of a consensus body (Silverman, 1987).

Toward Shared Governance

According to Alfred (1994), a factor universal to community colleges, irrespective of context, is the movement toward participative decision-making. As community colleges have become larger and more successful, attention has turned to the role of faculty in governance. Faculty leaders contend that continuing governance in a business-as-usual fashion with a minority of teacher activists participating in governance by means of collective bargaining will result in a strong adversarial presence in management-faculty relations and diminished loyalty among instructors (Slaughter & Broussal, 1986). The ideal scenario would involve faculty and staff participation in a broad range of institutional processes and a shift in the focus of professional roles from the periphery to the center of decision-making and policy formation. To accomplish this goal, new governance paradigms have been presented to strengthen the self-esteem of faculty through involvement in administration, opportunities for professional development, and recognition of expanded roles in decision-making (Alfred, Peterson, & White, 1992; Floyd 1985; O'Hara, 1990; Schuster et al., 1989). Alfred (1994) contended that:

> Effective community colleges will implement systems for continuous assessment and planning at all levels. In the process, faculty roles and work loads will change. Tomorrow's faculty members will do more than teach. They will forecast market conditions, plan and evaluate curricula, conduct research on student outcomes, build marketing and recruitment plans, lobby

> *private sector markets for resources, and perform other management functions as necessary to improve performance.* (pp. 248-249)

Strategies to Achieve Shared Governance

As community college leaders and staff consider approaches and strategies for implementing shared governance, initiatives are under way at a number of colleges to expand faculty involvement in decision-making. These initiatives have taken three forms according to Alfred (1994):

1. Modification of institutional processes (goal setting, planning, and assessment, etc.) to expand staff roles in governance.
2. Changes in administrative structure to open governance to faculty and staff.
3. Utilization of special techniques to examine faculty and staff roles in decision-making and to develop systems for shared governance.

Community Colleges Using Institutional Processes for Shared Governance

This is the study of one college's participatory strategic planning process. It is an example of one college using institutional processes as a means of achieving greater participation in decision-making and shared governance. The following are examples from three other community colleges using institutional processes to achieve shared governance.

Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD) recently completed a project involving staff at all levels to develop a collective image of what the community college should be in the coming century (Blong & Friedel, 1991; Rouche, Parnell, & Kuttle, 1994). The reasons for seeking this shared vision were to develop institutional focus, foster commitment, build communication, and reaffirm the college's mission and belief statements. The efforts to develop a shared vision, termed the "2020 Vision Process," involved a series of all-day in-service meetings, administrative retreats, a survey of the academic community, and the development of environmental impact statements focusing on factors likely to affect the college in coming years. The process involved every college employee and resulted in the revision of EICCD's Mission and Belief Statements, the formulation of new goals, and the creation of specific implementation strategies to achieve objectives. Among the new institutional goals identified were: (a) develop and maintain administrative and staff support dedicated to student learning; (b) recruit and retain students from diverse backgrounds; (c) encourage initiative, risk-taking, and individual responsibility; and (d) become an active partner in defining and addressing community and business needs.

Riverside Community College (California) initiated a strategic planning process designed to draw a larger portion of the college community into institutional planning (Vail, 1988). In the first meetings of the President's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (PSPAC), 58 faculty members, managers, and support staff gathered to address questions concerning the college's mission, goals, and programs. The committee met each Friday afternoon to discuss case studies of successful and unsuccessful businesses. The presentations made by the college president and other members of the committee served as exemplars of good teaching. Between the large group meetings, smaller groups met to review the discussion sessions on the week's case study or current topic. The discussion groups were expected to look at ideas from every possible angle but not to produce any product. Instead, action groups made up of representatives from the discussion groups were formed to come up with such products as a list of what the college did best, or needed to do. Despite early resistance to the adoption of a business mentality, newly learned business and marketing concepts were applied to the college. The final outcome of the first PSPAC meetings was a series of statements about the college's "business," vision, and values.

South Central Community College (Connecticut) received funding to develop a long-range planning process (Sturtz, 1984). The process, modeled on the 3-year planning cycle developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, used the college's existing organizational structure. A planning council was established as a pivotal committee for the planning process. In order to simplify and focus the planning efforts that had been initiated as part of a self-study process, the planning council undertook a five phase process: (a) *review and appraisal*, which examined the role and scope of the college, developed planning assumptions upon which the institution's goals were prioritized and provided information on the service region, college funding, student profiles, facilities and resources, staffing, programs and services, and governance; (b) *divisional goals*, during which faculty and staff met with deans and department heads to establish divisional goals; (c) *reformatting*, which involved a review of divisional goals and their statement of measurable objectives; (d) *approval by the president*; and (e) *renewal of the process*. The broad-based goals and objectives that were articulated in the resulting planning document established priorities for budgetary expenditures and personnel allocations.

In summary, each of these three studies describe college initiatives designed to use institutional planning as a vehicle for increased faculty and staff involvement. These three studies describe organizations where top-down approaches to decision making have changed to create organizational structures which are *flattened* to involve additional parties. As a result of these initiatives, the role of the chief executive officer has shifted from one of *control* to one of *establishing direction* for the institution through planning and participative decision-making.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Participatory strategic planning implies that everyone will have a role in the process. What is not clear is how those roles will be differentiated or what factors will determine the differentiation.

Several authors claim that a person or group must initiate and champion the process. Strategic planning only happens when involved, courageous, and committed people make it happen (Kanter, 1983; Kotler, 1976; Maidique, 1980). Bryson (1988) found in his research that champions believe in the process and are committed to the process, not to any preconceived answers. They may have good hunches about what might emerge, but their main belief is that following the process will produce good answers. Indeed they are willing to be surprised by the answers that emerge. The champions are not necessarily the initiators, but they often are. The initiator of the process needs to decide whom to involve. If the object of strategic planning is the entire organization, then the key decision-makers for the organization, and perhaps some representatives of external stakeholders, should be involved (Bryson, 1988).

Thompson (1967) suggests that for strategic planning efforts focused on an organization, it may be advisable to involve people from three levels of the organization: top policy and decision-makers, middle management, and core technical and front line workers. In a community college this translates to administration, department heads, and faculty and support staff. Top policy and decision-makers should be involved for several reasons. First, they are formally charged with relating the organization to its domain. Second, because of their responsibilities, they are often highly effective "boundary spanners," with links to many people and organizations both inside and outside the organization (Leifer & Belbecq, 1978). Third, they often are the most responsive to external threats and opportunities affecting the organization. Finally, they control the resources necessary to carry out strategic planning efforts and implement the recommendations that grow out of those efforts. It is difficult to plan around these people, and so if possible they should be included from the start. Middle management personnel should be included because of their vital role in translating policies and decisions into operations. Also, they are likely to bear the brunt of any managerial changes that result, and therefore should be involved to reduce unnecessary resistance and smooth out transitions (Kahn, and others, 1964; Kanter, 1983).

Core technical or front line personnel may also be needed to fashion an initial agreement. There are several reasons to involve these workers. First, they are in charge of the day-to-day use of the core technologies contributing to, or affected by, strategic change, and so they are most likely to be either hurt or helped by change. Early involvement may be necessary to assure that strategic choices can be made operational, or at least meet with minimal resistance. Second, technical or front line personnel will probably be asked for their opinions by key decision-makers (Bryson, 1988).

In addition to the three levels of personnel mentioned above, Ames and O'Banion (1983) stress a specific and important role for the chief executive officer in strategic management:

> If strategic planning is to have a solid base, the role of the chief executive in staff development cannot be overemphasized. The chief executive must be a model. This leader must develop his or her own personal understanding and commit institutional resources to the continuing development of others who will assist in carrying out the strategic plan. (p. 86)

Strategic Planning Team

According to Bryson (1988), a strategic planning team should be formed if one is needed. In theory, a team would be assigned the task of facilitating decision-making by the strategic planning coordination committee. The team would gather information, advise, and produce recommendations for the committee action. The committee would legitimize the process, provide guidance to the team, and make decisions on team-produced recommendations. In practice, a team may or may not be formed and may or may not serve as facilitators of decision-making by a coordinating team (Bryson, 1988).

If the organization is large, many people need to be involved, and if the situation is complex, a team may be necessary. Most of the team members probably will not need to work full time on the effort, except for a few brief periods. Formation of a team brings many different skills to bear at important times. The team should be headed by an organizational statesperson and should include members skilled in boundary spanning, process facilitation, technical analysis, advocacy, and self-criticism.

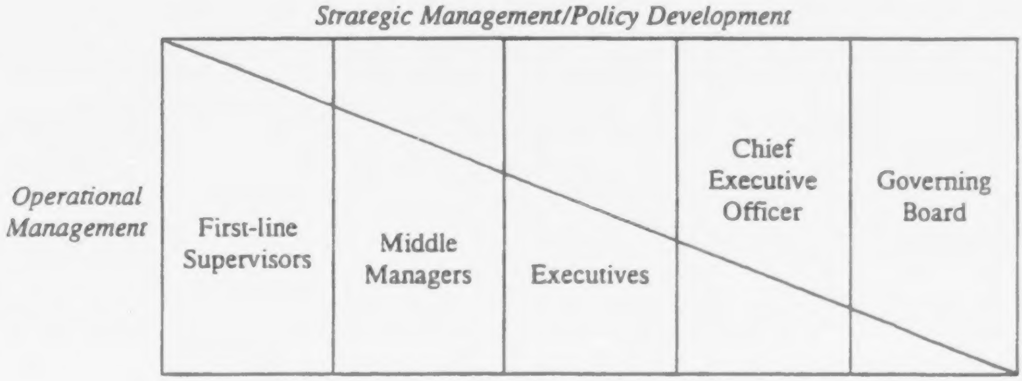
Strategic vs. Operational Matters

People from different areas of the college view the community college organization from a different perspective. The differing roles staff play in college operations and college policy making give each individual a unique perspective, but in turn these perspectives may be in conflict and cause frustration in communications. This section expands on those differences and how they may influence participants' perceptions.

Strategic management deals with steering the organization, and operational management deals with keeping it on course. Strategic activities take place in all areas and at all levels at which community colleges function. In each functional area, decisions are made that relate to the development of that area, and when brought into harmony with decisions in other areas, represent a self-definition of the college's future from the perspective of the decision-makers involved. There is, therefore, a dynamic interaction between policy/strategy decisions made by top management and the governing board and strategic operational decisions made by faculty and staff members at other levels. Table 5 is a visual depiction of this dynamic interaction.

TABLE 5

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT


Strategic Management/Policy Development
Operational Management
First-line Supervisors
Middle Managers
Executives
Chief Executive Officer
Governing Board

Operational activities take place in all areas and at all levels of the community college. Managers at each level meet deadlines, establish and follow rules and regulations, plan and implement contracts, develop and mange annual budgets, and supervise and coordinate staff. In general, operational activities take place in increasing proportion from the highest to the lowest management levels; the opposite is true of strategic management.

Table 5 illustrates the importance of communications among management levels. Middle mangers (associate deans, directors, and so forth) play a pivotal role because they tend to experience both the strategic and operational elements of college management; as a result, they can develop insights of great value to executives. Effective communications with those in operational roles is critical to ensure institutional strategies are informed and influenced by operations concerns and to assist managers at all levels to make decisions that are consistent with institutional strategies (Myran, 1983). Myran continues by stating, "No one person in a community college can simultaneously perform all management roles. In fact, quite often these roles are in conflict . . . and because each administrator has different strengths and management styles it is essential to focus on developing a management team" (p. 16). The challenge for the entire team is to deal effectively with conflict rather than to avoid or eliminate it.

Implementation Approaches

The approach an organization takes with the implementation of a strategic planning process may also influence a participant's perspective of the process. A number of authors have offered advice on formulating strategies with implementation in mind. This section discusses the ideas of Nutt and Backoff (1987), and Mazmanizn and Sabatier (1983).

Nutt and Backoff (1987), drawing on the work of Freman (1984), argued that different strategies are needed for different organizational stakeholders depending on the importance of the stakeholder and his or her position with respect to any given course of action. Nutt and Backoff propose using a two-by-two matrix reproduced in Figure 2. One dimension represents the stakeholder's importance to the organization, particularly in relation to the proposed course of action. The other dimension indicates whether the stakeholder supports or opposes the proposed course of action. For a given proposed course of action, the strategic planning team would locate stakeholders on the matrix in order to determine whether a winning coalition is possible, the likely size of the opposition coalition, and neutral or "swing" stakeholders who might be targeted for special lobbying and influence efforts. Nutt and Backoff go on to propose a set of tactics to deal with the different categories of stakeholders. (p. 51).

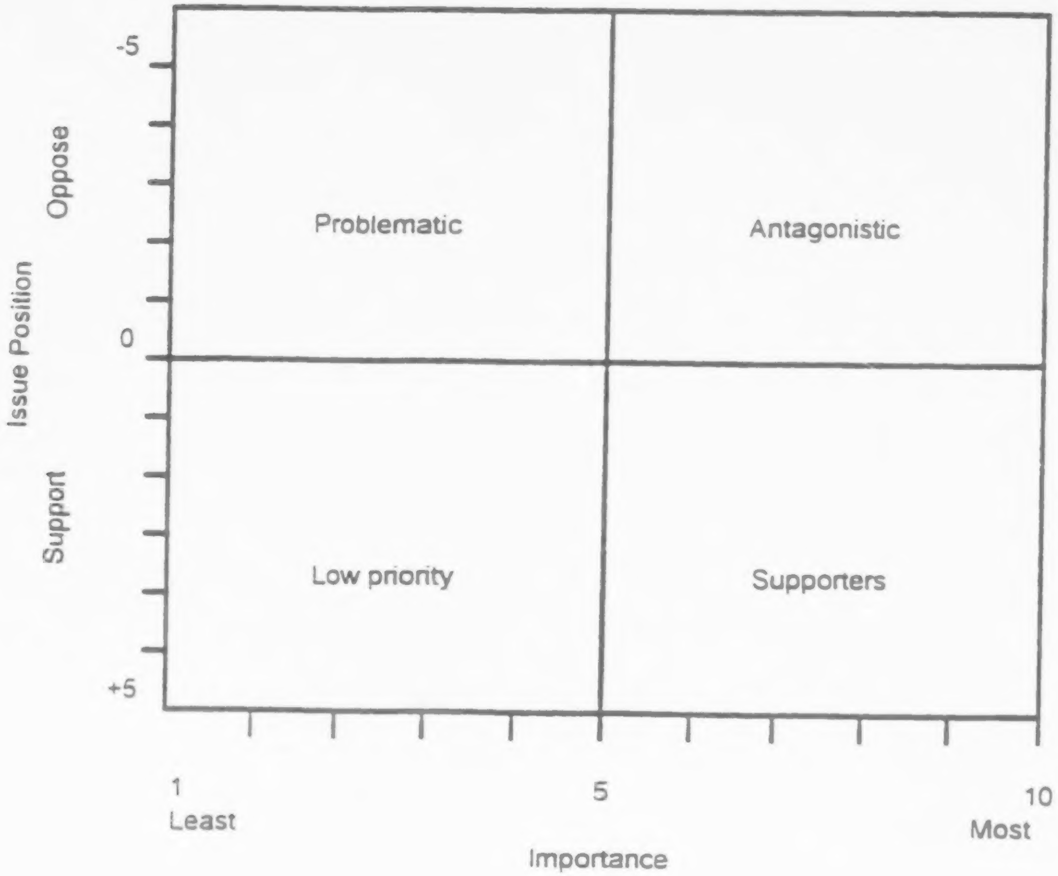

-5
0
+5
Oppose
Issue Position
Support
Problematic
Antagonistic
Low priority
Supporters
1
Least
5
10
Most
Importance

FIGURE 2

INTERPRETING THE STAKEHOLDER

SUMMARY

This literature review merges two theoretical threads: systems theory and institutional effectiveness. In this chapter, the foundations of systems thinking have been presented. The application of the systems thinking model was supported from models in business and leadership, followed by a discussion defining institutional effectiveness. These theoretical elements were then discussed in relationship to strategic planning and strategic thinking. The application of this theory was then explored through a review of shared governance practices, participation models, and implementation of participatory strategic planning models.

In his classic contribution to organizational development, Argyris (1970) espoused the essential importance of valid information made freely available to the organization – the system. According to Argyris, the system's clients cannot make informed choices, commit to a course of thinking or action, or feel any ownership of a process and outcome unless valid information is present. Argyris' ideas about the system's use of information creates the conceptual foundation for the learning organization (Senge, 1990) – organizations in which people, through knowledge, understanding, and learning increasingly expand their capability to shape the future. The learning organization is built on the principle of an integrated systems view of organizations.

Strategic planning is not an exact science. The differences between plans and the lack of plans within our own state demonstrates this point. Planning is an organic process that needs to meet both the needs of the constituents and the salient environmental issues present. The success of any planning effort is to the degree it has its constituents' participation and vitality expressed. The planning process itself needs to be flexible and also capable of providing enough of a template to pattern the thinking of an entire organization.

This study was conducted to better understand what participants value in a strategic planning process, as well as what elements may be a hindrance to participation.

Some person or group must initiate and champion the process. Strategic planning does not just happen; involved, courageous, and committed people make it happen (Kanter, 1983; Kotler, 1976; Maidique, 1980). It was the intent of this study to explore, in-depth, the perceptions of faculty, administrators, and staff involved in one community college's planning process in which participation was encouraged in order to better understand what strategies encourage and sustain participation in a strategic planning process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The purpose of my study is to examine the perceptions of participants involved in one community college's strategic planning process in which faculty, administrators, and support staff at all levels of the organization were encouraged to participate. This study used ethnography as a form of interpretive research to explore the patterns of the participants' reactions to a change in the strategic planning process. The basic goal of ethnography is to "create a vivid reconstruction of the culture studied" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 235). Ethnography is the method of choice for studying and interpreting cultural scenes or groups (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Classic ethnography is characterized by: (a) investigation of a small, relatively homogenous and geographically bound study site; (b) long-term and repeated presence of the researcher at the site; (c) use of participant observation as the preferred data collection strategy; (d) creation of a data base primarily of field notes; (e) preoccupation with the interpretive description and explanation of culture, life ways, and social structure of the group under investigation; (f) a fluid and developmental process of investigation; and (g) a process that is inductive (building generative categories and propositions from relationships discovered among the data), generative (concerned with discovering constructs and propositions using one or more data bases as the source of evidence), and constructive (developing units of analysis in the course of observation and description) (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This is the investigation of the actions of the NWCC Strategic Planning Council. The study is confined to the main campus of NWCC. I was a participant observer of the NWCC strategic council for a period of 3 years. A variety of methods were used to collect data over this time period. The constant throughout the study was the use of participant observation and field notes.

Ethnography facilitates learning about organizations from the inside out. This learning process is facilitated by providing researchers direct access to cultural knowledge, behavior, and symbols that participants share and use to interpret the daily experiences of their group (Schwartzman, 1993; Spradley, 1980).

INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH IN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY

Different approaches to research reflect different assumptions about organizations. These basic assumptions about organizational life influence the nature of the investigation, methodology, and the resulting research findings.

Sackman (1991) refers to these differences in research approaches as the differences between an outsider's and an insider's perspective. The outsider's approach is a deductive and quantitative one, based on a functional perspective with the goal of generalizing from data and established universal laws. In this mode of inquiry, researchers introduce concepts to the research site which are relevant to them only in regard to their specific questions. Culture is treated as one of several organizational variables that can be explained, predicted, and controlled.

In contrast, the insider's approach, which is based on an interpretive perspective, aims at gaining an understanding of life within a particular research site. The obtained knowledge is qualitative in nature, context specific, and situationally relevant, and cannot be generalized beyond its immediate context. The researcher interacts with members of the research setting and becomes experientially involved. The process is inductive in that concepts and hypotheses may emerge in this iterative and interactive process as data are integrated with observed experiences. Researchers are interested in a thorough understanding of the cultural context.

The researcher in this methodology provides participant observation, also known as field observation, qualitative observation, or direct observation. Participant observation refers to the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

Cziko (1989), and Morgan and Smircich (1980) provide arguments for the use of qualitative design in educational research. They claim that comprehensive and definitive experiments in the social science are not possible, considering the constant change and interaction of factors influencing human behavior. These authors believe that the most we can ever realistically hope to achieve in educational research is temporary understanding, rather than prediction and control.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this interpretive methodology naturalistic inquiry. This research is grounded in the following four assumptions:

1. *The nature of reality*. Realities are multiple rather than singular. Everything influences everything else in the present context. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that the possibility of causal relationships is limited.

2. *The relationship of the researcher and the researched*. The relationship of researcher and subjects is interactive and inseparable. Work with human subjects is complex in that humans may produce and effect in anticipation of its causes. Human behavior is context and time-bound.

3. *Generalization*. Generalization is limited by the time and context within which the research takes place. Generalization in this case is described as approximating, through words and illustrations, the experience that one might typically find in such a situation as the one described in the case. Transferability is the term used to describe how well a working hypothesis developed in Context A might be applicable to Context B. The degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, and is dependent upon a rich contextual description. Geertz (1973) uses the term "thick description" to characterize the descriptive quality of accounts found in interpretive studies.

4. *The role of values*. This process of inquiry is value-bound, thereby acknowledging the role of the researcher's values in shaping both the process and results of the research effort.

The story of my study can only be told in the words of the participants as heard by the investigator and the investigator's peers. The data of this study are the words and actions of the staff as reported by the participants. These words, phrases, and actions create a rich contextual description of the participants' experiences. The themes of my story are documented by the analysis of the repeated use by participants of words, phrases, and actions described. The primary sources of data for this study were the focus groups and the written survey. The focus group data were captured with field notes and videotapes. The written survey used the participant language from the focus groups wherever feasible. Open-ended questions were used to broaden the possibilities for participant responses.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In interpretive studies, the investigator is usually the instrument through which data are collected. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the role of the researcher in interpretive studies as "involved, subjective" and as an "active collaborator" (p. 24). Obviously, a concern with any interpretive study is that meanings which the research participants give to reality around them are interpreted accurately by the researcher. Many ethnographers believe that the reality of a cultural scene is the product of multiple perceptions, including that of the researcher and that produced by the interaction between the researcher and the participants under study (LeCompete & Preissle, 1993).

Early in the study, I was concerned that I would be perceived as an evaluator rather than an observer. I, therefore, attempted to convey a neutral stance during my time as a participant observer of the SPC. Early in the research period, nonverbal and verbal contributions to discussions were deliberately limited. From the onset of the project, triangulation of observations was made. The Assistant to the President for Staff and Organizational Development served as my mentor and collaborator to this process of entry into the council and ongoing partner for dialogue and triangulation.

The major safeguard against bias and inconsistency is careful documentation of the research process so that the quality of the evidence can be judged by others on its own merits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the study, my comments were recorded directly on field notes for analysis with other data, and also recorded within a research journal for use in subsequent discussion.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion of interpretive research also outlines characteristics specific to qualitative study. Characteristics that apply to this particular researcher's study are summarized below.

Research within the natural setting. The study of phenomena cannot be separated from context within which it takes place. Phenomena, whether physical, biological, social, psychological, or chemical, derive meaning as much from their context as they do from themselves.

Researcher as primary research instrument. Only the human can understand and evaluate the meaning of interaction. Humans are uniquely qualified as research instruments because of their ability to respond to cues, adapt, and find the appropriate target for focus. Interactions are seen as an opportunity to be exploited rather than an intrusion leading to error.

Qualitative methods. These methods are sensitive to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered. Qualitative methods are a natural extension of other human activities, such as looking, listening, speaking, and reading. These activities naturally relate to research methods such as interviewing, observing, reviewing documents, and interpreting.

Purposeful sampling. This sampling method allows the researcher to increase the scope or range of data exposed, and be flexible in taking into account local conditions, values, and events. Sample units are chosen to extend the information already obtained, to obtain contrasting information, or to fill in gaps in the information.

Inductive data analysis. This process allows one to impose a purposeful structure that emerges from the interaction between investigator and phenomenon. Data obtained in the field are analyzed inductively, from specific units of information to larger categories of information. Content analysis is performed through coding units of data and placing previously coded data into categories that provide descriptive or inferential information.

Negotiated outcomes. Negotiated research outcomes result because meaning is negotiated between the views of the researcher participants. Findings that might apply to a given context are best verified and confirmed by those who were sources of information within the context. Such negotiation improves the trustworthiness of study results.

Criteria for trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers are concerned with the concept of trustworthiness when designing their studies. The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can the researcher persuade her audiences (including herself) that the findings of the study are worth paying attention to? Within functionalist paradigms, the criteria that have evolved in response to this question are termed internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

There is no question that the qualitative researcher is at least as concerned with trustworthiness as is the conventional researcher. However, criteria designed from a functionalist perspective are not appropriate to the framework of interpretive research. Basic assumptions which guide interpretive design concerning the nature of reality and purpose of the research process vary dramatically.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest alternate criteria for establishing trustworthiness. The alternate criteria applicable to this study include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Methods of establishing *credibility* include prolonged engagement within the research setting, persistent observation to allow the true nature of reality to emerge, triangulation of data sources and methods to verify results, and participant checks by research participants of emerging research results. *Transferability* of research methods or findings to appropriate contexts is promoted through rich description. Ethnographic description is explicit, detailed, and includes identification of methods, analytic categories, and characteristics of phenomena within its setting. *Dependability* of research results is enhanced by the presence of accurate and explicit records. This requires meticulous attention to the organization of field notes, interview transcripts, and research documents. A detailed journal outlining data analysis methods and emerging research design is suggested to support record keeping. *Confirmability* of research results is enhanced through the process of triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of more than one source of data and/or method for obtaining data to enhance the likelihood that results can be confirmed in a variety of instances, sources, or methods.

According to Mitchell (1993), the notion of the researcher role as an autonomous, self-directed creation can be over stressed.

> Fieldworkers do not claim, assume, or take their research roles with the vigor or assurance these active verbs might suggest. Qualitative investigators are well aware that the roles they play in the field are not strictly and exclusively of their own choosing. . . . Qualitative research roles are in practice, tentative offerings, possible forms of self, subject to negotiation and to the vicissitudes of the action settings. The mistaken belief that the researcher's role is unmitigated by those whom he or she studies remains the positivist's unachievable hope. Indeed, the distinction between research and other self-conscious action is precise and unequivocal only in retrospect. (Mitchell, 1993, pp. 12-13)

Schein (1988) describes process consultation as a way for researchers and subjects to diagnose organizational problems and design solutions together. In his view, it is essential that the researcher not share his insights prematurely for two reasons: he does not want to be wrong and lose credibility, and he does not want to be right and invoke defensiveness before sufficient trust is established (Schein, 1988).

Ethnographic investigations seldom fail from lack of data alone. More crucial are the distortions that occur when the cognitive and affective attributes of relationships with subjects grow out of balance, when perceptions are shared and mutual sympathies are not roughly commensurate with shared information. These problems may be highlighted by examining four hypothetical research roles (see Figure 3). These roles are characterized as the combinations of two dimensions of researcher-subject relationships: The affective (sympathetic vs. unsympathetic) and the cognitive (naive vs. informed) (Mitchell, 1993).

Finally, the researcher pulls together the findings from the group and together they examine assumptions which may aid or hinder progress on stated change goals. This process is part of a shift, advocated by Schein (1991), from ethnographer to clinician as the relationship with a client is strengthened, much like the move from outsider to insider. Like Argyris (1970), Schein (1991) maintains a traditional research paradigm has not worked well; it has produced very reliable results about very unimportant things. In that process, we have lost touch with some of the important phenomena that go on in organizations, or have ignored them simply because they were too difficult to study by the traditional methods available (Schein, 1991).

Low —— Affect —— High

High —— Cognition —— Low

	Unsympathetic	Sympathetic
Informed	Informed—Unsympathetic Spies Threaten intragroup solidarity. Problem: Faith in transparent disguise. (Parading the emperor's new clothes.) Problem: Faith in dispassionate observation. (Perpetrating the Bond/Bogart myth.)	Informed—Sympathetic Allies Facilitate intergroup solidarity. Problem: Paradox of intimacy.
Naive	Naive—Unsympathetic Outsiders Facilitate intragroup solidarity. Problem: Missing the theatrical.	Naive—Sympathetic Novices Socialized or exploited. Problem: Researcher as prey.

FIGURE 3

COGNITION, AFFECT, AND PERCEPTION OF THE RESEARCHER'S ROLE

(Mitchell, 1993, p. 14)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The ethnographer observes and sometimes asks questions; his method requires minimal disruption of the system being studied, and he is interested in learning whatever the system has to teach him. Not surprisingly, the ethnographer concludes that unobtrusive assumptions of an organization's culture act as powerful barriers to learning and change (Schein, 1988, 1990).

The role of the researcher is in the process and not distinct from the actors. My role as participant observer was the role of an outsider. As I became more informed, I was utilized by the group as an outside facilitator who was an outsider yet appropriately informed to be used by the group. The second year, I became a member of the group by appointment and moved to a more informed and sympathetic role. I then became an insider and was able to understand the insider perspective.

SITE AND STUDY POPULATION

Researchers who employ ethnographic approaches use sampling and selection somewhat differently from investigators interested in generalizing their results to larger populations. Inferences made by ethnographers tend toward explanation of the phenomena and relationships observed within the study group. Ethnographers use criterion-based selection in choosing the group or site to be studied (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

This study took place on the campus of NWCC. Criteria which resulted in the selection of this site were: (a) single-campus system; (b) medium size institution; (c) ease of access for the researcher; and (d) consent from the institution to conduct the study. NWCC is a fictitious name used for the institution that was studied.

A single campus system was chosen for its less complex organizational design. A medium-sized institution was identified as being desirable for ease of learning the system, and establishing credibility and trust with research participants. With one main campus and two outreach centers, NWCC fit the criterion of a single campus system. The college employs 182 full-time faculty and serves 30,000 students for a total of 6,500 student FTE annually. The college is considered medium-sized when compared to its sister schools in the region.

One defining characteristic of ethnographic research is that the researcher goes into the field instead of bringing the field to the researcher. Schwartzman (1993) characterizes this as learning "about a culture from the inside out" (p. 4). Since repeated field observation over a several year period was planned, this design dictated the selection of a community college with ease of access.

I was new to community colleges and relatively unknown to the selected institution. I was first employed at NWCC in January of 1991. My previous experience was with a national nonprofit volunteer organization focused on the development and administration of adult community educational programs. This criterion was important so that the site could be entered without preconceptions and so that relationships established with research subjects were unencumbered by work history.

The process of gaining entry into the field site is important in determining many of the subsequent parameters of a research project (Johnson, 1975). Schwartzman (1993) reminds us that first encounters provide researchers with a rich source of data, for it is in these first encounters that the most dramatic differences between the ethnographer's culture and the informant's culture are apparent.

During the early phases of my study, I was somewhat concerned with how my current position and college affiliation might open some doors within the institution while closing others. I came to understand that, as described in Agar (1980), official explanations were not as important in influencing how people judge or trusted me as was the manner in which I conducted myself on a daily basis.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Wolcott (1975) characterized a critical underlying aspect of ethnography is the use of varied modes to gather information. Pelto (1970) says, "examining cultural behavior with a variety of different approaches greatly enhances the credibility of research results" (p. 145). In keeping with this precept, my study consists of six distinct stages (see Table 6).

Stage One: Initiation of the investigation. I observed the NWCC Strategic Planning Council and participants' actions as they related to the original strategic planning process being used in September 1992. This process involved reviewing the previous year's strategic plans written by the individual departments and the current strategic plans being submitted to the council members for their review and synthesis.

Stage Two: I served as a facilitator for the NWCC Strategic Planning Council in the redesign and creation of the *new* strategic planning process. New forms and directions were developed by the council to communicate the new strategic planning process envisioned by the council to the college. I was a facilitator and a participant observer for three pilots studies of this new process. I was then a participant observer as the new process was introduced campus-wide in the fall of 1993.

Stage Three: Focus groups were conducted by members of the NWCC Strategic Planning Council to assess the effectiveness of the *new* process. I was an appointed member of the NWCC Strategic Planning Council and a participant observer of the seven focus groups. I transcribed the focus group videotapes and conducted an analysis of the transcriptions using the Ethnograph software. The NWCC strategic council refined the *new*

TABLE 6

CHRONOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Stage	Data Collection/ Analysis Techniques	Activity
Stage One *Original Process* (09/92 - 02/93)	Field Observer	Observe NWCC SPC
	Document Reviewer	Review previous year's strategic plan, current strategic planning documents, planning guidelines, forms, and procedures
Stage Two *New Process* (03/93 - 10/93)	Participant Observer	Facilitate redesign of strategic planning process with SPC
	Participant Observer	Pilot the *new* strategic planning process
	Participant Observer	Initiate the *new* process campus-wide
Stage Three *(1) New Process* *(2) Focus Group Interviews* (10/93 - 09/94)	Focus Group Interviews	Conduct focus groups to assess effectiveness of the new process
	Analysis of Focus Group	Debrief peers • Transcribe videotapes • Enter transcription into Ethnograph software
	Participant Observer; Document Review	Give feedback to the institution, make recommendations based on the focus group data analysis, and review documents.
	Participant Observer	Refine the *new* process
	Participant Observer	Pilot refined process • Initiate refinements campus-wide.
Stage Four *(1) Refined Process* *(2) Follow-up Survey* (09/94 - 06/95)	Participant Observer	Design a written survey to assess effectiveness of the *new* refined process.
	Participant Observer	Pilot the written survey
	Participant Observer	Conduct survey
	Analysis of the written survey	Analyze data using EXCEL • Debrief peers • Triangulate • Review documents
	Participant Observer	Give feedback to the institution, make recommendations based on the data analysis, and review documents
Stage Five *(1) Data* *(2) Analysis and Synthesis* (06/95 - 06/97)	Analysis of data from focus groups, written survey, and follow-up questions included in NCHEMS survey	Reduce the data • Debrief peers • Triangulate • Review documents
Stage Six *Theory Development* (06/97 - 05/98)	Theory Development	Develop grounded theory and hypothesis

process based on information obtained from the focus groups. These recommendations and refinements were presented to the organization through a number of forums and meetings held on campus. A pilot version of the refined process was conducted in the summer of 1994. In Fall 1994, the refined *new* strategic planning process was initiated campus-wide.

Stage Four: I led the design of the NWCC Strategic Planning Council written survey to assess the effectiveness of the refined *new* planning process. I piloted the survey and then managed the distribution to every staff member. I analyzed the survey data using the software program EXCEL. The open-ended questions were analyzed using a peer debriefing methodology. I was an outside observer for triangulation. I reviewed the documents from each of the units. I made recommendations to the NWCC Strategic Planning Council for the institution based on the data analysis and document review to further refine the execution of the *new* process.

Stage Five: In stage five, I analyzed the data from my field notes, institutional documents, focus group transcripts, written survey, and follow-up questions asked in the NCHEMS (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems) Institutional Performance Survey conducted spring of 1996. This synthesis included the construction of the story.

Stage Six: At this concluding stage, I developed the grounded theory and hypothesis.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The primary qualitative data collection techniques as referenced in the chronology are described in the narrative that follows.

Field Observation/Participant Observer

Through observation, one can learn which issues receive careful attention and close scrutiny. Such issues are often central to the organization's culture yet community members often do not notice.. As an outsider, an observer often sees symbols to which community members have become habituated and no longer perceive. As with symbols, the outsider may also see traditions that insiders do not notice.

Limitations of this technique include the amount of time required to conduct observations, singularity of the observer's perspective, and the observer effect or the staging of behavior for the observer's benefit. A major advantage of direct observation is that it provides the current experience in an in-depth manner unequaled by other research techniques.

> Observation maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs and the like. Observation allows the researcher to see the world as subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural ongoing environment. (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p.193)

Focus Group Interviews

Prestructured questionnaires and interviews pose difficulties when one is studying culture from an insider's perspective. Respondents are asked to answer questions thought to be relevant by the researcher and posed from the researcher's perspective (Spradley, 1979). Hence, respondents are required to understand and conform to the researcher's culture, rather than employing the language of their own culture and raising issues important to them in their particular setting.

In contrast, in-depth unstructured or semistructured interviews, such as focus groups, are more effective in uncovering culturally based values (Schein, 1992). By using broad and open-ended questions, and trying to use the insider's language, the researcher entices the interviewee to unravel aspects of everyday life in his/her particular cultural setting. The process of interviewing attempts to elicit individual perceptions without using external cues, thus providing a more appropriate perspective for the study of dimensions of culture than survey methodology (Birnbaum, 1988; Tierney, 1990).

Interviews are intrusive, but they are valuable tools for clarifying observations. They can serve to verify and extend information obtained from other sources (triangulation) or constructions developed by the researcher (member checking). A major advantage of the interview is that it allows the respondent to move back and forth in time.

The NWCC Strategic Planning Council used focus groups to gain understanding from the participants' point-of-view of the effectiveness of the new strategic planning process. Members of the council reported that the change in the strategic planning process had created conflict. The council determined they needed a vehicle to better understand the experiences of participants. The council used information gleaned from the focus groups to learn about the insider's perspective so refinements could be made to the strategic planning process that would encourage participation and improve planning efforts.

Document Review

Document review is a third research technique useful as a means of filling in the gaps that interviews and observations leave. It is also a valuable source for historical and background data on the research site. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe documents as rich sources of information, in that they are grounded in the context they represent.

Institutional documents provided a formal framework for the context of this study. This review included the mission statement, the institutional strategic plans, department strategic plans, council minutes, and forms and guidelines developed by the SPC pertaining to the strategic planning process. Other documents that were reviewed were NWCC Board of Education minutes, and other institutional group minutes that address the strategic planning process.

Organizational documents can be viewed as a form of cultural artifact. Documents may reveal the values and assumptions that are held by a group or by key individuals. Since they are generally produced for the consumption of organizational members, they are useful as indicators of the internal language of the organization. Documents are also valuable because they are not subject to recall or interpretation. Historical accounts, annual reports, minutes, mission statements, or other records may highlight traditions, values, and beliefs, as well as the participation of key individuals.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed by the constant comparative method. This process, outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and adapted from Glaser and Strauss (1967), describes a mechanism for analyzing data where the researcher looks for "key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data, that then become categories of focus within the study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 74). The researcher looks for recurring instances of particular phenomena, paying special attention to the "diversity of dimensions under the categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 74). This process required that the researcher write details about the categories being explored while attempting to describe and account for all the incidents the researcher finds in the data, continually searching for new incidents. The researcher "engages in sampling, coding and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories" (p. 74). The researcher works with the data developing an emerging model or theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Data analysis, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), is "the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and enable you to present what you have discovered to others" (p.153). The products of this analysis will include the organization of data into manageable units, the synthesis of the data where patterns and themes have been identified, and the identification of what information will be presented (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

In this study, I used a constant comparative method of analysis. Focus group interviews were transcribed immediately following the event and analysis began upon completion of the transcription. The use of the constant comparative method allowed me to look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that became categories of focus (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The data from the focus group interviews were analyzed looking at two sets of relationships: those within and among the participant departments and those within and among the participants, as they described their reaction to the strategic planning process changes.

I analyzed the data from the questionnaire looking at several different relationships (i.e., department, years with the college, and gender). The most salient and consistent patterns were further investigated to establish a model for understanding the data.

VALIDITY

Triangulation is a strategy used by researchers to verify that what one perceived to have happened has actually occurred. Verification may be difficult to obtain, and what researchers may gain instead is a deeper and richer perspective of the research in progress. Triangulation can increase the probability that the researcher's perceptions are accurate.

Typically, researchers will utilize multiple methods and sources of data outside of the actual research to support the findings by showing that the independent measures agree or disagree with the findings. Researchers have found that, "it is essentially a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Denzen, 1978; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966)" (Mathison, 1988, p.13). I used four strategies for triangulating this study: comparison of the focus groups and the questionnaire findings, comparison with the literature, an examination of institutional documents, and peer debriefing.

DATA REDUCTION

The coding procedure described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is integral in the development of grounded theory and in this study. A process of open coding was used as the first step of the analysis. To begin the process, I read the transcripts several times. Each transcript was marked and areas of interest were highlighted. After the transcripts were highlighted, I began naming each discrete incident, idea, and event; this process is open coding as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Categories were identified where concepts pertaining to the same phenomenon appeared, the categories were tentatively named, and the categories were then described in terms of their properties (Seidman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The next process in the analysis of the data is referred to as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where researchers put the data back together. In this study, connections were made between a category and subcategories that had been identified. This was the time in the analysis when the development of a category went beyond its properties and dimensions. This process allowed the researcher to look at the data by "linking subcategories to a category in a set of relationships" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99). Any proposed relationships discovered through this process were supported by the data. A computer software program, The Ethnograph (version 4.0. Amherst, MA: Qualis Research, Test Version, February 1994) was used to facilitate both open and axial coding.

THEORY DEVELOPMENT

The final step in the coding process as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is selective coding. The researcher must make the "final leap between creating a list of concepts and producing a theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.23). This is the time in the analysis when the researcher presents the interpretation of the data in a form consistent with the development of a grounded theory. Grounded theory develops inductively and is "derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents . . . it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.23). It is at this time in the data analysis the researcher answers the question, "what has this research meant to me?" (Seidman, 1991).

The theory development for this study was based on the selective coding of data that I collected through the various stages of this study, i.e., through the participant observation, the focus group interview, the written survey and finally the NCHEMS follow up questions. The theory development process is a reduction of the coding into concepts that are compared in each discrete aspect of data collected. Themes, then concepts, and ultimately a consistent and repeated pattern define a theory for these data, which takes the form of several hypotheses in this qualitative study.

SUMMARY OF METHODS

Qualitative research, participant observation, and focus group interviewing specifically, provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore and "understand the details of people's experience from their point of view" (Seidman, 1991, p.103). This study examined the perceptions of participants involved in a 3-year strategic planning process cycle. The data were collected through direct observation, focus group interviews, analysis of institutional documents, and a pen and paper questionnaire. The focus group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The researcher analyzed the data through a constant comparative method, using a coding system presented by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The reduction of the data produced themes exploring the reaction of participants to the new strategic planning process. A qualitative data analysis computer software program was used to facilitate this process. Credibility was enhanced by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation used in conjunction with use of outside investigators. The study was triangulated through a comparison and contrast with the focus groups and the questionnaire as well as the literature and examination of institutional documents. This grounded theory approach resulted in the development of a theory, promoting a better understanding of the meaning for the participants involved in the strategic planning process.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESEARCH

I began my research by serving as a participant observer of the 1992-93 Strategic Planning Council at Northwest Community College. As a recent hire at NWCC, I was hoping to gain a better understanding of the organization through observing the SPC. The council consisted of 27 members on 3-year assignments. I observed council members listening and following along in huge notebooks as individuals presented budget unit strategic plans one by one. Questions were raised to clarify the language; sometimes clarification was sought from the source. Attendance was marginal; rarely were there more than nine members present. I thought the process was an interesting yet time-consuming way to learn about all the areas of campus.

In my field notes, I characterized the planning process as "pre-budget whining." Clearly, strategic planning was intended to be a preparatory step for the budget process which was handled in a closed session by the President's Council. Each presenter was hoping that the SPC would recommend allocation of dollars to meet his or her needs. The process reminded me of the 1950s television program, *Queen for a Day*. Each presenter appealed to the council for funds based on heart wrenching stories; as each person spoke of all the great work that had been accomplished and how many more needs could be met with just a little more money; doom and gloom were the only alternatives to large budget allocations. As a naïve observer, it seemed to me a strange way for an institution to envision its future, and I soon realized I was not the only person perplexed by this institutional procedure.

The NWCC strategic plan which the college used to communicate its future and to guide budget development was published and distributed to each budget unit manager. Its 549 pages, 172 of which were the executive summary, were a product of a middle management led, top-down process with very little staff involvement. My informal poll of managers revealed that the strategic planning process was viewed simply as a method for the creation of an enormous document. Due to the most recent budget constraints, managers had spent less time and involved fewer staff in a process that actually consisted of changing dates on the previous year's plan.

This study follows an organic process of change wherein the NWCC SPC members recommended and implemented a new and different strategic planning process to stimulate greater staff involvement and enhance organizational alignment in mission and goals. The core of this study involved the formal evaluation processes of the new planning process conducted by the SPC, i.e., a series of focus groups conducted in 1993-94, and a paper and pencil survey conducted in 1994-95. This case study is intended to inform the educational profession on the process of initiating participatory strategic planning.

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NWCC was chartered three decades prior to this study in Suburbia, Oregon. At the time of this study, NWCC served a 950 square mile geographic district with 216,00 residents. Since its charter, the college had grown dramatically, from 429 full-time students in 1965 to more than 6,500 in 1995. Including part-time students, approximately 30,000 persons were enrolled annually at the time of this study. Similar to other community colleges, NWCC provided:

1. Transfer degree programs.

2. Professional/technical degree programs.

3. Developmental education for persons needing to strengthen language, reading, and writing skills in preparation for further college level learning, including English as a second language training for new immigrants and citizens.

4. Community education and services for all residents of the district.

5. Training contracts with area businesses and industry.

6. Special classes and seminars for developing or increasing job skills.

The college also functioned as a community center for athletic and recreational activities, music and dramatic performances, and many major community events. Thousands of persons used the campus each year for conferences, workshops, and community meetings.

In the mid 1990s, NWCC employed more than 500 full-time staff members with 182 full-time faculty, 33 administrators, and approximately 275 support staff. In addition, more than 300 part-time faculty supported the instructional program. Fifty percent of the full-time employees had been with the college for more than 15 years and had begun to consider retirement. Many of those had begun their careers with the college in the 1960s were leaving. One of the results was increasing numbers of new staff who brought fresh ideas, new skills, and an invigorating sense of passion to the organization.

At NWCC, the SPC was appointed by the college president each year, with council members representing the different areas of campus. The council met and reviewed all the area plans. The council's assigned task was to identify duplication of effort, inconsistencies across plans, and to perform a general critique. As a part of its review, the council routinely proposed institutional priorities. These recommendations were then forwarded to the subsequent budget development committee. In the spring of each year the council coordinated an assessment process in which each area of the college evaluated the progress achieved in meeting its objectives.

According to the Director of Research and Planning at NWCC (NWCC Strategic Planning Council Annual Report, 1991), NWCC's strategic plan chronicled current conditions and highlighted planned actions for the coming years. The plan was a result of a series of collaborative meetings at a variety of levels and intensities among faculty, support staff, management, and student leaders. Influenced by severe resource constraints that persist to this day, implementation of the strategic plan at NWCC became a bottom-up process with focus on the short-term. The primary value of strategic planning was found in the process approach to problem-solving. This process approach was documented through an action plan that included a reiteration of institutional philosophy, an analysis of current conditions, and a detail of strategic changes that could be implemented within available resources (NWCC Strategic Planning Council Annual Report, 1991).

As the college entered the 1990s, several elements converged to bring about introspection and resulted in proposals for the type of change addressed in this research. One change was the review and revision of the NWCC mission statement. This work was completed in 1990. After refinement of the mission, the council sought to identify how the mission was being integrated in the institution and produced the *Mission to Measurement* document in 1991. This report broke out mission themes, identified program and institutional practices that carried out the mission, and identified expected outcomes and means of measuring these outcomes. In *Mission to Measurement* (1991), it was stated that the following basic principles should be incorporated in the strategic planning process:

1. Mission should drive planning.
2. Unit mission should reflect organization mission.

3. All system pieces should fit.

4. Through full integration of strategic planning methods, measurement and accountability would emerge from those who are directly involved in each specific area.

5. With greater staff participation in the planning process, the college district could be assured of better decisions for deeper understanding of, and higher commitment to, implementation of area action plans.

Through these activities, the 1990-91 SPC reinforced the principle that the purpose of strategic planning is to fulfill the mission. This first *Mission to Measurement* document was produced by the 1990-91 NWCC SPC primarily through brainstorming and recall processes, and was an interesting exercise that gave focus to both mission and measurement. However, the report brought to light that the strategic planning process was not focusing on the mission.

Work continued in the 1991-92 school year following the budget development process, as SPC made the *Mission to Measurement* document more comprehensive, useable, and orderly in format. Strategic planners were asked to look at the document and consider linking it to both the planning and assessment processes. By the end of the 1992 academic year, most areas had attempted to write down operations and practices related to the college mission. According to the Director of Research and Planning at NWCC, the result was more focus on the importance of mission and measurement, and more understanding of how both relate to planning. However, the documenting process remained unwieldy and efforts still seemed to be an add-on to the planning process (NWCC Strategic Planning Council Report, 1992).

STAGE ONE: ORIGINAL PROCESS
(September 1992 - February 1993)

By the fall of 1992, the annual cycle of strategic planning for NWCC had become a routine process. The "original" process was the planning cycle I began observing in September of 1992 (see Table 6, Chronology of the Study). Area plans were developed at the program and departmental level after which summaries were created across the divisions and primary administrative units. To aid in the planning, the Research and Planning Office provided which included assessment results from the prior planning cycle, program improvement process findings, and various reports dealing with environmental scanning, enrollment trends, and student outcomes. Following its customary practice, the SPC began the 1992-93 academic year with a thorough review of area plans for 1993-94 and beyond. As the process unfolded, it soon became apparent to the council members that the strategic planning process itself was as much in question as the content of the plans.

As a new observer I was sure the SPC was the magical place where the seeds of new programs and processes were sown. Whenever I had proposed a new idea in the past, I had heard from the Chief Financial Officer, "was it in your strategic plan?" This answer implied that there was a clear, direct connection between implementation of a new program, strategic planning, and the budget process. I had never dreamed this reply might just be a canned retort, a mechanism of deflection, a block to ensure that the idea was never processed or at the minimum a stall effort. Yet I learned that it was the most polite way for the CFO to say no.

The SPC of 1992-93 was comprised of the following staff: one vice president, two assistants to the president, two deans, three associate deans, one director, three support staff, eight faculty, and two students from the student government. This council was touted as the most cross-sectional, representational group on campus. I was an observer of the council. The council began meeting in October. All members were given a copy of all the unit strategic plans, which filled a four-inch 3-ring binder and consisted of 30 individual plans. The basic format for the original plan was as follows:

1. Profile (what did you do last year).
2. Plan.
   - A. Objectives to be met with existing resources.
   - B. Objectives requiring additional resources.
   - C. Staff development requirements.
3. Plan for 2 years and beyond.

This had been the strategic planning format for the previous 8 years. Members were asked to review and present plans to the whole council. The plans were distributed among the members so that all plans would be presented. Patiently, council members walked through each unit plan; there was discussion for clarification, but no decisions were made about the plans, and a plan was sent back to its source only if it was incomplete or impossible to understand.

As an observer of the council, something became apparent to me when we reviewed the plan from the Business Office. The CFO had submitted last year's plan in its entirety. The council sent it back to him and requested that he, out of courtesy, at least change the dates on his currently submitted plan to reflect the new planning cycle. This was a big clue to the seriousness of the exercise we had all been involved in over 6 weeks. Disillusionment sunk in. I began to believe the SPC was the only group on campus to read this huge document, even though everyone on campus had been given a copy at great expense.

I soon learned that most associate deans would send a copy of the old plan to coworkers, ask for updates, and then edit the original document. In some cases an associate dean would merely change dates. Most frequently, there would be an update to the profile section detailing the accomplishments of the previous year. Since resources at NWCC had remained flat over the previous 4 years, there was little motivation to expend energy in changing the plan. Since there were no new resources, many believed this planning effort had no influence on the budget. Most planners anticipated, at best, a rollover budget.

After 6 weeks of work I felt that strategic planning at NWCC was merely an opportunity for venting frustration, or in other words, pre-budget whining. It was an opportunity for units to publicly display their needs, with no expectation that the ritual we were involved in would change anything in the organization the presentations reminded me of *Queen for a Day*, only everyone was the second runner up.

The Director of Research and Planning noted in the Strategic Planning Council Annual Report (1993) the following concerns with the process:

1. Lack of consistency in how plans are formulated across different units.

2. Lack of clarity in the relationship between unit plans (program, discipline, and office) and plans created at subsequent levels up the organizational ladder (division, area).

3. Lack of a coherent end result. The overall plan is simply a summary of bottom-up plans rather than a document providing overall institutional direction and priorities.

4. Lack of clarity in the relationship between strategic planning and subsequent decision-making and resource allocation (NWCC SPC Annual Report, 1993).

These concerns are similar to the findings reported by Deegan (1992) in which he noted that there appears to be a wide gap between the amount and impact of strategic planning activities going on institution-wide as contrasted with the activities occurring in the individual college departments. This finding calls into question the extent to which a strategic plan will be effective if there is such a relatively low level of integration between institution-wide plans and plans at the department level. Because of these concerns, the SPC members decided to devote their energies during winter and spring of 1993 to a complete review of the strategic planning process with the aim of identifying possible improvement strategies.

STAGE TWO: NEW PROCESS
(March 1993 - October 1993)

Harry L., faculty council member, and I were recruited to facilitate an all-day council retreat. The goal articulated by the council members was to design a new strategic planning strategy that would be an active participatory process rather than a repetitive process that resulted only in the creation of another thick document to be stored on a shelf (see Table 6, Chronology of the Study). The following basic principles, outlined originally in the *Mission to Measurement* document (1991), were to be incorporated in the strategic planning process:

1. Mission should drive planning.
2. Unit mission should reflect organization mission.
3. All system pieces should fit.
4. Through full integration of strategic planning methods, measurement and accountability would emerge from those who are directly involved in each specific area.

5. With greater staff participation in the planning process, the college district could be assured of better decisions for deeper understanding of, and higher commitment to, implementation of area action plans. (NWCC Mission to Measurement, 1991)

The SPC scheduled a retreat in the NWCC boardroom. This room had large heavy tables set in a formation for holding and recording board meetings, not a table arrangement conducive to the retreat activities that were planned. After we discussed at length whether the tables could be moved, I unplugged microphone cords and moved the tables into a cluster group formation. For the first time that anyone could remember, the tables were no longer in the standard "U" shape and for participants the moving of the tables was much like an omen: if we could change the predetermined configuration of the boardroom, we could also start to envision other changes.

Fifteen members of the council attended the retreat held from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., April 23, 1993. Before presenting the agenda, Harry L. reminded the council of the guidelines the SPC had adopted as ground rules several months earlier. He distributed a handout and asked for acceptance of these guidelines once again. The guidelines for the SPC were: (a) we are in no hurry; (b) there are no hidden agendas; (c) the only agenda is to have the SPC become a dynamic force helping NWCC achieve its mission in the context of strategic management; (d) there are no sacred cows or closed issues unless there are legal reasons prohibiting their examination and discussion; (e) be prepared to suspend beliefs and assumptions; (f) assume nothing is fixed; (g) do not be bound by what has happened before: directions, formats, structures, concepts, etc.; (h) in all areas and issues, develop and maintain an attitude of supportive and constructive skeptical inquiry; (i) candor is paramount; (j) evaluation of ideas must be constructive at all times and will be kept separate from the generation of those ideas. All members renewed acceptance of these guidelines and the tone was set for the retreat.

The first task of the retreat was to envision the ideal strategic planning process for NWCC. Three groups of five were asked to develop a list of the important elements and outcomes of the ideal strategic planning process. The product of this work provided a context and framework for the next tasks. The key characteristics of the ideal strategic planning process were defined as: (a) serving as a guide for the entire organization; (b) maintaining a long-term direction; (c) assisting the organization to respond to changed internal and external environments; (d) defining the business; (e) establishing a strategic mission; (f) containing specific performance objectives (in relation to the long-term direction); (g) articulating strategies to achieve objectives; (h) providing a rationale for resource allocation; (i) facilitating coordination of all strategic decision-making; (j) supporting a proactive versus reactive posture; and (k) establishing a fluid process for implementing, executing, evaluating performance, and for reformulating the strategic plan for its implementation as it adapts to the environment.

The next step was more tedious. Returning to their same small groups, participants were now asked to take "sticky" yellow notepads and break the strategic planning process into critical components, one component or element per sticky. Each component was a step, or an action, that would be necessary in the ideal strategic planning process. The groups struggled with this for a few moments, while Harry L. and I went from group to group to help members focus and to help them define an element. By lunchtime, each of the groups had completed its task; the walls of the room were covered in yellow sticky notes.

New Model of Strategic Planning Process

After lunch the groups were asked to take their components and to construct a time line defining who would do what, and when. Groups were encouraged to step back periodically and borrow ideas from other groups. Each group was given another chart page on which to attach its yellow sticky notes to form this time line. Harry L. and I circulated as referees and resources, the groups worked in an animated fashion, with yellow sticky notes flying everywhere and heated discussions arising over clarification of terms. Finally, each group presented its newly created time line model to the larger group, which as a whole then picked one of the three models to serve as the framework for the new NWCC process. Once again the groups were given time to move the yellow sticky notes around and polish this select model of "Who Would Do What and When" to construct the final framework for the NWCC strategic planning process. The result was a framework of the important components and steps of NWCC's new Strategic Planning Process (see Table 7).

This new model described a 3-year planning cycle, with the first year as an implementation year. Starting in the spring of 1993, a new form would be developed and the process initiated. Some unit plans would be drafted as pilot planning units before the new forms were distributed college-wide. Then, in the summer of 1993, the 1993-94 budget would be formally adopted, and units would then be able to write their operational plans for the coming year. The summer would also be a time for managers to draft college goals following their work on vision statements for each of the teams. Having the draft goals would set up a process for a bubble up and a bubble down of college goals and having draft goals would give the units a framework for their planning in the

TABLE 7

STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL DRAFT PROCESS MODEL

		SPRING 1993	SUMMER 1993
		•New Form for Plans •Process Designed •Some Unit Plans Written •Teams Write Vision	•Budget for 1993-94 Finalized •Operational Plans for 1993-94 •Draft College Goals
FALL 1993	WINTER 1994	SPRING 1994	SUMMER 1994
•Unit Plans 1994-95 and Beyond ↓ •Team Review Plans ↓ •VP Team Plan •Administrative Plan •President Office Plan •SPC Team Building •Managers Training, TQM SP	•Unit Budgets Due ↓ •Team Prioritize Budget •Review 1993-94 Operations Plan •Proposal for External Scan •Internal Scan Evaluation	•Budget Finalized •Operational Plan 1994-95 •Planning Assumptions 1995-96 •Futures Forums •Unit SP 1996-97	Team SP Plans 1995-96
FALL 1994	WINTER 1995	SPRING 1995	SUMMER 1995
•VP Team Plan •Administrative Plan •President Office Plan •SPC team building	•Unit Budgets Due ↓ •Team Prioritize Budget •Review 1994-95 Operations Plan •Proposal for External Scan •Internal Scan Evaluation	•Budget Finalized •Operational Plan 1995-96 •Planning Assumptions 1996-97 •Futures Forums •Unit SP 1995-96	Team SP Plans 1996-97

fall. The college goals would not be finalized until the synthesis of the plans was completed at the end of fall term.

In the fall of 1993, implementation of the model would begin institution-wide. The distinct difference in this new model was the synthesis and integration of plans. Instead of having the SPC be the body to review the plans, the plans would be synthesized and integrated through the teams and then melded into one plan at the president's council level.

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The president's council would then consolidate the plans and write the college goals to be adopted by the Board of Education. This radically changed the role of the SPC from a review body to a council that facilitated and oversaw the strategic planning process. This new role would require additional training for its members. The SPC also saw a need for manager training in strategic planning. It was thought that training for managers would help to facilitate the process across the various units.

In the winter of 1994, the focus would be on the budget process. Once again this was seen as a process that would be integrated through the teams. Budget decisions would be influenced by the strategic plans. Units would update and review their operational plans for the year. Internal and external scans would be conducted in the winter term and then updated in the spring term.

In the spring of 1994, the planning assumptions for the coming year would be established, the budgets would be finalized, and units would write their operational plans. A campus-wide *Futures Forum* would be held to discuss the implications of the planning assumptions. Units would then complete their strategic plans for the coming 3-year cycle. The council felt that spring was a better time for this work than to cram it into fall term. The new strategic plans would be written at the same time the evaluation of the current year's operational plan was done. This would give the teams the summer to synthesize and integrate the plans.

In the fall term of 1994, the new model would be in place; the implementation period would be complete. The fall focus would be on the integration of the team plan to form the college strategic plan to be presented to the board. The following terms would follow the pattern from the previous year.

Form Development

Next, the council set out to design a form that could be used to implement the new process at the unit level. The whole council made suggestions and formed a subcommittee to develop a template. The retreat was wrapped up with a review of the work accomplished and a discussion of the agreed upon next steps. It was exhausting work but there was a sense of accomplishment expressed by members throughout the room. Harry L. said, "I never thought we would get this far in one sitting!"

The subcommittee met several times to devise a format for the information to be collected from each of the individual planning units. Subcommittee members brought in models from textbooks, other colleges, and businesses. Traditional models were compared to the elements the work group had defined at the retreat. A NWCC form was fashioned to build a framework for strategic thinking and to build on the planning principles outlined in the *Mission to Measurement* document. The form asked units to (a) define their mission, (b) define their customers, (c) describe their environment, (d) prioritize goals, (e) show alternative scenarios for meeting their goals, and (f) detail the costs to their optimal alternative. This last step ensured that the strategic planning process was linked to the budget process. The form in its entirety is included in Appendix B. An explanation of each part follows.

Unit mission. The first item on the planning document was the articulated mission of the unit. The unit was to define how the unit carried out its work in relationship to the college mission. They were asked to answer the question, "What was the primary purpose of this particular planning unit?"

Customers. The customer was any person, group or unit, or agency to which the planning unit provided a service or product. One way a unit could determine its customer was to ask, "Who would be inconvenienced if we quit doing what we do?" Most units at the college had multiple customer groups, some external and some internal.

The third *Mission to Measurement* principle stated that "all pieces should fit." To understand the planning unit's fit, one needs to understand the unit's internal relationship to the college and how this unit fits within the environment. This was another critical component. The form asked for detailed descriptions of the environment.

Environmental Conditions. In this section, planning units were asked to articulate their unit's: (a) key assumptions (those things that are essentially beyond your control that have some impact on whether, sometimes, and how you achieve your goal); (b) internal strengths (those aspects of your program that you do well in relation to customer needs); (c) internal weaknesses (those things that get in the way of achieving your goals); (d) external threats (those aspects that represent a problem or difficulty for you or your program or area); and (e) external opportunity (aspects that represent a chance for you or your unit to enhance what you do and how you serve your customers).

The last phase of the planning process was the most detailed. This section of the form dealt with the articulation of goals for the unit. The fourth *Mission to Measurement* principle ("through full integration of strategic planning methods, measurement and accountability will emerge from those who are directly involved in each specific area") required a full description of the unit's goals, outcomes, and how they would measure these goals. In addition, the form asked for an action plan to build in accountability.

The *Mission to Measurement* planning principle stated that "with greater staff participation in the planning process, the college district could be assured of better decisions for deeper understanding of, and higher commitment to, implementation of area action plans." This was something the form could facilitate but was really a process issue that the council needed to explore. With the new form drafted it was critical to look at process and to run a pilot test.

Following review and adoption of the new strategic planning process and form, the SPC took two immediate steps in an effort to ensure smooth transition into the new process. The first step was to recommend re-appointment of the existing council for another year to maintain continuity. This continuity was accomplished even though some of the members were not available for continued service. The core of the 1992-93 council was retained with replacements as necessary; four additional members were recruited. The council's second step was to appoint a steering committee, which would continue to meet throughout the spring and summer. The steering committee monitored and/or participated in pilot tests of the new strategic planning process and form, and coordinated preparations for the fall 1993 planning effort.

PILOT TESTING

Pilot 1: New Strategic Planning Process and Form

The first group to pilot the new strategic planning process was the Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Athletics, and Aquatics (HPERAA) area. The Associate Dean of this area was interested yet skeptical. His first comment was, "this group isn't noted for their ability to work together." As the complex name of this area implies, this unit had divergent interests. The Associate Dean reported to two superiors, the Dean of Instruction for his instructional areas, and the Dean of Students for his athletic and recreation responsibilities. Two-thirds of the staff were faculty, and half the faculty carried coaching responsibilities.

The other third were classified positions. The division was also geographically removed from the center of campus.

I was assigned the task to facilitate this pilot group project. The Associate Dean, Willis, agreed to a full day retreat off campus provided the retreat would include team building as well as strategic planning. Willis was not convinced that strategic planning could support teamwork: "It has not been my experience that strategic planning is conducive to teamwork, sleep maybe, teamwork I don't know."

This was the first time any of the staff had seen the entire division gathered for a planning meeting. They were duly impressed that the retreat was scheduled off campus and lunch was included. Before planning as a unit, it was critical that the staff think of themselves as a unit. The morning began with an exercise highlighting everyone's expertise in the unit. I set up a grid of colored paper. Each segment of the department had a different color paper (Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Athletics, and Aquatics). The large group of 15 was divided into three groups. To get a good mix of people in the unit, I had the staff physically line up in order of hire. I then had them count off 1, 2, 3. This gave us a nice mix of history with the institution in the smaller work groups. It also provided an opportunity to break up some of the *deadly* combinations of personalities that the Associate Dean was concerned about. It was amazing to see the wide range and crossover of activities that the staff had for experience in this arena. The support staff was reluctant at first. "I've never taught anything, but I drove my kids to swim lessons for 5 years. Does that count?" Willis replied immediately, "Yes, that has been an important experience for your family." As a large group we brainstormed a list of the customers served by the unit. This set a framework for defining the purpose of the unit.

The next task of the retreat was to articulate a vision of where the department wanted to be in the next 10 years. The same groups continued to work together as they brainstormed their vision of where HPERAA would be in the next 10 years if unlimited resources were available. The groups were encouraged to develop a visual display of their vision. Terry described their vision paper as "a huge sports complex drawn by a 3-year-old." The full group discussed the common themes of the three different visions. These themes became the organizers for the unit's long-term goals.

From the shared vision we were able to move to the discussion of a mission statement. I asked each person to think of our mission as a short seven-word description of what business they were in, something that described the essence of their work. Then after looking at other statements, everyone wrote down on a card what he or she thought the mission was. The cards then were shuffled and passed back to the group so that each person read one statement aloud. The ideas were then merged into one mission statement, which was then compared with the college's mission statement.

At the end of the retreat we took 5 minutes for feedback. I asked participants to write down what they liked best about the process, what needed improvement, and any other thoughts they might want to articulate. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Carol said, "I have worked here for 18 years and this is the first time I have been involved in this kind of process. I think it really helps a support person to know where everyone is coming from. Thank you." It was the first time everyone had been included; previously only faculty had been involved. The fact that each member of the group took time from their busy schedule to be here made the day a big success. People felt it was a great team building effort. Sal wrote me a note, "You are a brave person to take this group on. It was nicely done. Today was a breath of fresh air for the group." Little was said about what they thought of strategic planning.

The department was able to fashion six goals that were based on the draft of the mission statement and vision themes at the following staff meeting. It was not until this work was established that the Associate Dean distributed the SPC form to self-selected subcommittees to develop action plans for the goals.

Pilot 2: Admission and Records

Marge and I volunteered for the next pilot group, the Admissions and Records department. This group met on a half-day retreat at the director's house. The group consisted of 15 female classified staff, none of whom had ever been involved in strategic planning before. The director, Mary Kay, who is a very task-oriented manager and had little faith in the strategic planning process was concerned that the retreat be "productive." This was also the first time the group had been assembled for a retreat, even though most of them had worked for the college for more than a decade. It was not Mary Kay's style to "allocate staff time for this stuff." Nervous that she would be "in trouble with the president" for closing the office early for a day in the summer, there was no way she would have considered an all-day retreat.

Marge and I felt that team building was critical, for this group that had always worked in isolation. We started the retreat with an icebreaker exercise asking each person to explain why she had the most important job on campus. The purpose of this exercise was twofold: (a) to give everyone an understanding of each other's work in the unit, and (b) to give everyone the opportunity in the group to speak and be heard. As a large group we then brainstormed the customers served and the key assumptions for the unit.

Our next exercise was one that involved the principle of self-organizing. In the interest of productivity, we moved straight to goals for the unit. We asked each person to take an 11 inch by 17 inch piece of paper and write down one goal that they would like to see accomplished in the unit in the next few years. Once every participant had his or her one goal written down, each silently circulated and looked for goals that were similar. We asked them to form cluster groups around their goals. The self-selected groups were then given permission to speak and were asked to articulate their goals on an additional piece of paper. The staff developed six goals. Then, with an applause-o-meter, the staff ranked these goals into priority order. The top goal was then detailed out in an action plan as the strategic planning form required. This gave the unit a template to follow for the five remaining goals. The staff agreed to work as subcommittees to finish the work with their goals.

The last thing we worked on was a mission statement. Marge and I followed the same plan I had used with the HPERAA unit. Each person wrote a one-sentence statement that was the essence of the Admission and Records department. Each statement was read aloud. In a very few minutes the group fashioned a single statement for the unit. In 4 hours, we accomplished team building, and defined a vision, mission, and goals in priority order. Subgroups were formed to work on the form for each of these goals. The subgroups were self-selected to detail an action plan for their goals. A process had been put in place to complete the form for the unit before the busy fall registration period.

Pilot 3: Business Office

The business office was another service area that had a difficult time doing strategic planning in the first few weeks of fall term, so this group also agreed to pilot the form and process in the summer. Once again Marge and I had a 4-hour period to work with. Following our success with Admission and Records, we used the same format. The unusual thing with the business office group was that the managers, the Chief Financial Officer and the Director, chose not to participate, claiming they had other commitments. The lead person for the group was a supervisory staff person, a member of the SPC.

All three pilot processes began with groups working through the first half of the form collaboratively. The groups worked together on the mission, vision, customers served, and goals for the units. Subgroups of self-selected individuals who felt committed to specific goals, then did the detail work of the goals and filling out the form. In every case the groups participated willingly and expressed that they felt acknowledged by being included. These activities reinforced the principles that (a) through full integration of strategic planning methods, measurement and accountability will emerge from those who are directly involved in each specific area; and (b) with greater staff participation in the planning process, the college district could be assured of better decisions for deeper understanding of, and higher commitment to, implementation of area action plans (NWCC Mission to Measurement, 1991). These pilots were also a demonstration of what Blackmore (1989) described as leadership which is concerned with communitarian and collective activities and values. This process was both educative and conducive to the democratic process.

College Goals

In order to bring direction to the fall planning effort, Dr. Shoe, Executive Vice President and Council member, took the lead in preparing both an institutional plan and the 1993-1996 college goals. The process involved the entire management team. The NWCC Board of Education reviewed the resulting goals in July. This draft of college goals was included in the fall planning packets, and each planning unit was asked either to frame its own plans in the context of the presupposed college goals or to submit additional goals for consideration. Each member of the president's council coordinated team-planning efforts within their respective areas. Five teams were designated: Student Success, Teaching Effectiveness, Workforce Quality, Administrative Services, and the President's office. Figure 4 illustrates the team membership.

Strategic Planning Council 1993-94

On September 8, 1993, the leadership team, consisting of all department managers, held a daylong off-campus meeting focused on strategic planning. Presentations were made by Strategic Planning steering committee members to train managers to use the new Strategic Planning form and to share experiences from the three pilot projects that had been conducted over the summer. Due to time limitations, managers were not trained in group process or team building.

Planning packets for fall 1993, were prepared and distributed across the college in early September. The new strategic planning form was to be completed and submitted to the next level, the team level, by October 1st. On November 1st, the teams submitted a combined and synthesized plan to the vice president's council. The president's council refined the synthesized plan. This refined plan was submitted to the NWCC Board of Education in January 1994. This was an aggressive time line for a new process to be implemented.

As part of the annual NWCC inservice period, Thursday, September 16, 1993, was declared Strategic Planning Day by the Staff and Organizational Development Steering Committee. This day was dedicated time during the inservice week, when classes were not in session, for planning units to gather to complete their strategic plans for the coming 3-year period. SPC steering committee members served as a resource for the college as the

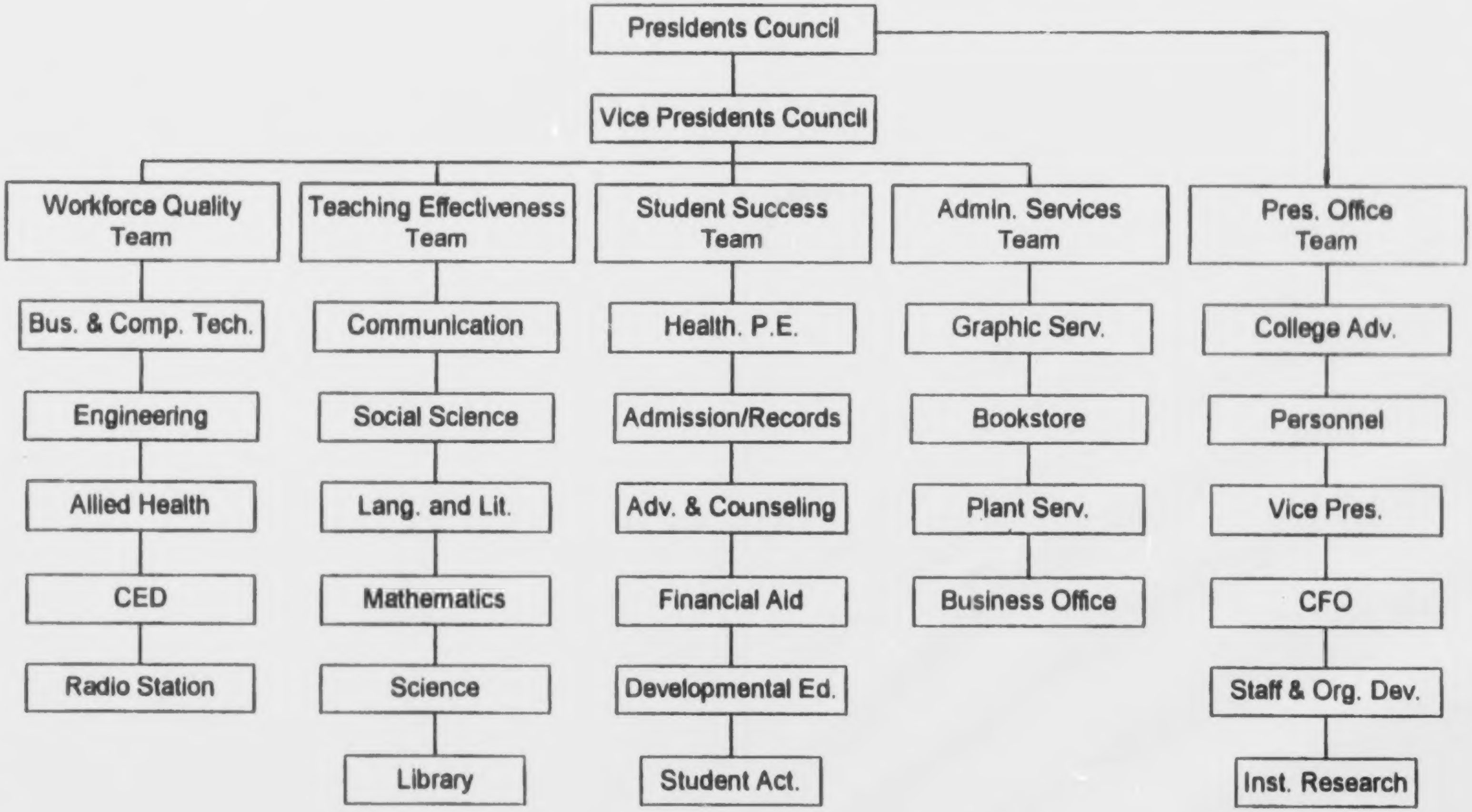
Presidents Council
Vice Presidents Council
Workforce Quality Team
Bus. & Comp. Tech.
Engineering
Allied Health
CED
Radio Station
Teaching Effectiveness Team
Communication
Social Science
Lang. and Lit.
Mathematics
Science
Library
Student Success Team
Health. P.E.
Admission/Records
Adv. & Counseling
Financial Aid
Developmental Ed.
Student Act.
Admin. Services Team
Graphic Serv.
Bookstore
Plant Serv.
Business Office
Pres. Office Team
College Adv.
Personnel
Vice Pres.
CFO
Staff & Org. Dev.
Inst. Research

FIGURE 4

NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM MEMBERSHIP institution moved into this critical period of adopting the new strategic planning process and form. Steering committee members served as facilitators, counselors, and participant observers for various planning units throughout the college.

STAGE THREE: NEW PROCESS AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS
(October 1993 - September 1994)

The SPC meetings resumed in October 1993. The president asked all the members from the previous year to continue and new members were recruited to replace the four members that could not continue. My role changed from being an observer to a president-appointed council member (see Table 6, Chronology of the Study).

The first meeting began with SPC members reporting on their own experiences with the process initiation in their respective areas. Marge started the conversation with: "There was really good feedback from in-service week evaluations. People were happy to see a day scheduled to focus on the work of strategic planning. It is clear that the entire organization has been involved in this new strategic planning process." This was echoed by the reports of the other council members. Greater involvement of staff at all levels of the organization was a significant change from the earlier method of strategic planning and reports were uniformly positive; the process clearly engendered a high level of participation, team building, and energy.

Council members declared that the new Strategic Planning form proved to be both challenging and rewarding, because it focused on outcomes and demonstrated effectiveness. Elvira from the Transitions Grant Program said, "the old plan was negative and dreaded. It didn't get read or drive the institution. The new form is easier to use. Big improvement! It forces you to state where you are and your plan of action, and more realistic goals are formulated." Although the Strategic Planning form initially appeared to be overwhelming, the structure and content of the new form had stimulated improved dialogue within each area. Members reported that as a result of these discussions there was a deeper understanding of the purpose and direction within each area. Adam, from Advising and Counseling, explained that, "our work was a synthesis of goals. It was a full group process. Things weren't dropped out, but brought together. We moved from nine division goals to five, we originally started with 22 individual goals." The new procedure using the computer was particularly praised, especially the WordPerfect diskette option for writing up the new plan. Previously only hard copies had been used to transfer information between areas of the college.

Many members said that a healthy degree of skepticism remained throughout the college. Stan, from Automotive, agreed. "The experience was positive on the whole, but there is a 'wait and see' attitude that still prevails. Results will speak louder than words." Harold, from Communications, followed his statement with, "Wait and see is prevalent. I think staff sees this as a radical change in thinking and mindset. It is only natural that it creates anxiety, but we have to change the mindset, to change the institution. I think the skeptics are beginning to melt." Council members stated that the subsequent processing and synthesis of these plans were critical to the overall success of the new system. One common question raised was, "what organizational outcomes might be expected as a result of this new strategic planning?"

There was consensus on the council that feedback from the SPC would be very important to sustain what they felt was initial success. Dr. Shoe, vice president of NWCC, articulated the need for feedback:

> Anxiousness expressed about where plans go after leaving their area may be a result of the short time lines. It is important to remember that you can go back and revise your unit plans, fine-tune them. It will be key that we read these plans, we have to pay attention to what has been said everywhere. It

> has to become clear that the business of planning is ongoing; staff needs to feel they are not forgotten. We need to congratulate ourselves on the work that has been done but also remember that the feedback loop for information on plans is critical.

Areas of particular concern included the merging of unit goals with the division goals; merging of division goals with the teams goals (workforce quality, teaching effectiveness, student success); relationships of the goals to educational reform; the role, if any, of maintenance goals (ongoing operations); and the overall result of the process. Staff motivation was linked to each individual's understanding of how his/her contribution was to become a part of the larger college process. Another issue involved grant programs and their connection to program and college goals, given that grant program goals are determined to a great extent by external agencies. The SPC decided that a more extensive assessment of the change process was needed, and a plan to evaluate the most recent activity was created.

Assessing the Change Process

The SPC now discussed the more extensive assessment of the change process in order to better understand the concerns articulated by the council members. Several members suggested using a paper and pencil evaluation, but the council was concerned that the evaluation method needed to be consistent with the goals of improved communication and active participation. A "form to evaluate a form" would be too impersonal, and valuable information might be lost if there were no dialog. The SPC decided that a deeper qualitative investigation was needed and that focus groups would be the best vehicle to evaluate the perception staff had of the new process.

The focus groups began with a pilot in late October. Participants were chosen randomly in order to obtain a good mix of staff from the different bargaining units. Each group was assigned a facilitator and a note taker, and each session was videotaped. A total of seven focus group sessions were conducted.

The questions asked of the focus group participants concentrated on their perceptions of the recent change in the strategic planning process. The first seven focus groups, which included representation from across the campus, examined the planning process that occurred at the division and unit level. Later, the SPC conducted an additional focus group session comprised of managers to evaluate the subsequent planning process at the team and vice president council level. My study is centered on the first seven focus groups, which reflected participant reactions to developing unit strategic plans.

The focus groups were scheduled to meet at the lunch hour in the library reading room. Lunch was provided. I was the note taker at three sessions and the facilitator at two others. I did the transcription of all seven focus group session videotapes.

Focus Group Participants

The SPC asked to have each focus group represent the college mix, that is, the different bargaining units: faculty, managers, support, and supervisory staff. A designated number was calculated to determine how many people to select from each bargaining unit. I asked Marge how she had arrived at the individual names to meet these targets for a random stratified sample. She told the following story between outbursts of laughter due to the highly scientific method used. Using lists of members in the bargaining units, Harry and Marge took turns closing their eyes and pointing at names on the lists to get an unscientific but stratified random sample. They considered it a simple solution to what could have been a painstaking process. Support staff from the office of Staff and Organizational Development called the designees and scheduled them for the focus group sessions. All but one participant attended their scheduled appointment.

During late October through the first week in December of 1993, a subcommittee of the SPC ran the seven focus group sessions to obtain feedback regarding the experiences staff had had with the new strategic planning process and strategic planning form. The subcommittee was comprised of: (a) two business faculty; (b) an assistant to the president for Staff and Organizational Development; and (c) a director (myself). Marge, Harry, Will, and I facilitated the focus group sessions. Each focus group had at least one manager, one classified staff member, and two faculty. The seven focus groups reflected the combined distribution shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

CATEGORICAL COMMONALITIES

Bargaining Unit	Participants (*n*)	Years with NWCC	Age Range	Female	Male	Ethnicity
Faculty	13	15 year average	37-60	4	9	Caucasian
Managers	7	2-20 years 5 in the last 5 years	45-60	1	6	Caucasian
Support Staff	9	8 year average	40-55	7	2	Caucasian
Supervisors	5	12 year average	35-58	3	2	Caucasian

Focus Group Process

The process in the focus groups was similar: in all the focus groups a designated facilitator asked questions, a note taker recorded comments and who spoke, and Mark, Audiovisual Specialist, operated a video camera. Participants were at various stages of eating their lunches. Participants politely paid attention to the questions and the facilitators, and spoke one at a time. Most of the dialogue was between the facilitator and individual group members. Many times the group would laugh together, but overall the tone seemed formal. Participants were neither particularly nervous nor relaxed. Some brought notes and/or copies of their unit's plans.

The facilitators opened each session by welcoming participants and encouraging them to eat their lunches and ignore the camera, and encouraging everyone to relax. Participants were told to "feel free to speak whatever is on your mind, whatever first comes to mind." The facilitator was charged with asking the following questions:

1. How did your strategic planning take place? Please describe the process.
2. What worked?
3. What did not work?
4. Describe your feelings about the strategic planning process.
5. How do you think strategic planning can create change?

Analysis of the Focus Groups

The conversations in the focus groups were dominated by a pattern of dialogue between the facilitator and an individual; group conversation was less frequent. The first question seemed to set this pattern. Not all groups covered all five of the questions. All got through the first four adequately. This was due to the design established by the subcommittee and the varying abilities of the facilitators.

The final focus group session felt like it should be the last session; answers to the focus group questions had become repetitive and predictable. Knowing what questions the facilitators would ask participants, the participants came to the focus group sessions with notes and points to make in a more formal way than in the first focus group. Eventually, participants answered questions before they were even asked.

After all the focus groups were completed, notes were typed and distributed to the focus group subcommittee. Next, the subcommittee was gathered for a peer debriefing in which members discussed the focus group process and emergent themes observed. Marge facilitated this session and wrote a summary of the debriefing for the SPC's annual report.

I transcribed the audio portion of the videotapes, then I moved the data into the Ethnograph software program for ease of further analysis. The Ethnograph facilitated data manipulation and coding for theme identification. The themes identified in the peer debriefing were confirmed in the initial Ethnograph analysis. I then sorted the data by planning unit and looked at the reaction to the process. Following this analysis, I performed an analysis of participant categorical descriptions of themselves and their reactions to the changes being made in the strategic planning process. The feedback of this analysis was first presented to the managers in April of 1994.

Peer Debriefing Report

What follows is a summary of the pattern of answers to the focus group questions by the participants as recorded in the field notes, and in the transcription of videotapes, and as reported by the subcommittee members who conducted the focus groups.

Question 1: Describe how strategic planning took place in your area? The strategic planning process varied considerably across the different units. The variety of process methods included the use of outside facilitators, use of a retreat setting, and blocking out time on campus for full and half-day sessions. Some planning units began in spring, some in summer, and others did not start until fall. The number of meetings scheduled to conduct strategic planning and complete the form ranged from one to five, with an average of three meetings. Some areas worked through the entire process as a unit while others broke into small groups, coming together to prioritize goals. A final prioritizing session in which all members of a planning unit were present and in agreement did not happen consistently across all departments. The areas reporting the most favorable strategic planning experiences were those in which all participated in the process and where the final plan was shared. The majority, an estimated 60%, of the focus group participants reported they found the strategic planning experience interesting, challenging, and helpful, while the remainder of participants felt varying degrees of frustration and uncertainty.

Question 2: What worked? Overall description of participants' strategic planning experiences reflected positive attitudes, a willingness to have faith in the process, and understanding that the process would be easier next time. For example, Shirley stated, "Our manager conducted a feedback session this morning; we were able to see how our goals fit in the overall picture. Our area all agreed that next year will be much easier."

Participants who made use of outside facilitators consistently expressed satisfaction with the planning experience. Facilitators proved helpful by providing training along with guidance and organization. They also served as buffers for confusion or hesitancy about the process. Nancy from the Library put it this way: "The person from the outside helped us see more clearly. The process was much better than I expected. It was invigorating. I think that it really helped to have Marge there as a *cheerleader*. Whatever it was, it was a wonderful day. We finished the plan all in one day." Departments that used facilitators typically blocked out more time for planning work. Those who used the retreat format (on or off campus) expressed greatest satisfaction with the process. Blocking out time, getting away from distractions, and focusing were all helpful. Many liked having a day in the September staff inservice week dedicated to planning.

Working on the area mission contributed to a unified sense of purpose and team building for the planning units and many favorable comments were made about the process being inclusive. "The communication was great! A first for our division. It was a great process because it made each of us aware of the others in our division and where we fit in." Several persons said this was the first time they had participated in strategic planning. Conducting planning within the context of the college mission and goals, and working with the department and division missions were both consistently cited as helpful in shaping direction for the rest of the planning process. Reaching consensus on area goals also contributed to staff members having a deeper understanding of one another's work and to team building in general. People felt heard and valued. "We've been heard, the college is listening."

The new form prompted groups to think deeply about purpose, assumptions, constituents, priorities, accountability, and timing. Many respondents noted that while the planning was hard work, in the end they liked doing it. "We used the form as a guide, not as a rule. Our understanding was that the form could be kind of fluid. It was much more fun than prior years. In the past, it seemed like managers did any old thing just to get it done." In considering implications of the new planning process participants said they were prompted to think about the bigger picture. Using electronic systems and being able to access other strategic plans allowed people to work more effectively and to readily observe what others were doing.

Question 3: What did not work? Insufficient time was a prominent concern. Many participants experienced frustration with the pressure of deadlines, the need for reflective thinking and discussion, and the lack of time to become thoroughly oriented to the new process. Gill, Associate Dean of the Science Division, was adamant about the problems with timing.

> I have 11 units and 22 people in my division. I felt there was too little time to accomplish the task at hand, and felt frustrated by the time lines set down. I broke the division into three units to do the initial goal setting for their areas. However, due to the lack of time, I had to do the final synthesizing for the division, which left many of the participants frustrated with the process. I plan to have staff complete their individual plans for the next year by the end of spring term.

Despite these concerns, many did acknowledged that year-long strategic planning could ease the annual fall term planning frenzy.

Some participants were resistant to the use of the terms client and customer. "I sure didn't like some of the terminology, especially the 'customer' term used to apply to students." The terminology seemed foreign. It was uncomfortable to use business terms in describing educational services.

Leadership training for planning was inconsistent and in some cases insufficient. "What didn't work was the way it was presented. It is such a new process but the tendency is to make this year's plan like last year's. A single presentation to everyone at once would have helped a lot." Leaders who were members of the SPC or who did early pilot planning were at an advantage. Leaders who received one day of orientation and tried to do strategic planning in one day during professional development felt much more pressure. In some cases they did not have a clear grasp of the process and how to work with the form, and they were unfamiliar with terminology. "Managers didn't fully understand the need to train the trainer."

A number of participants found the form confusing, specifically those portions dealing with outcomes, measurement, alternative strategies, and budget details. "Cram our desires into that form? It just didn't work for us." There was, initially, considerable confusion about processing goals. Participants worried that if their individual or program goals did not get carried forward in division goals, or if division goals did not appear in team goals, those goals were dead. The question of the hour was "what happened to my goal?" Gradually groups began to understand that goals could be implemented locally and did not have to appear in the more general division, team, or vice president's council documents. Sometimes this was expressed as confusion between what is an operational goal and what is strategic goal. Alice, a clerk in the business office, stated:

> My area was surprised to find that the majority of our goals can be accomplished without additional money. We are excited about that and feel it is a positive idea for the staff and one they can move forward on, even if their goals are not incorporated into the campus-wide strategic plan.

Question 4: Describe your feelings about the new strategic planning process. The most common response to the new process was guarded optimism. In spite of time pressures, uncertainties about goals, and lack of clarity about the new process, respondents indicated an overwhelming willingness to try to make the new effort work. There was a tremendous amount of good faith and good will to move forward without a real grasp of the outcome. Respondents generally had good feelings about the process based on its inclusiveness, the fact that it prompted them to think more deeply and in more detail, and their pride in working through priorities successfully. Johnny from the Wellness Committee described this circumstance in her area:

> For the first time my area was included in the strategic planning process. Even though everyone's goals were not included in the final area plan, the "buy-in" felt better to everyone because they had all been given a chance to input their ideas and needs. It's very important to understand the rationale regarding why certain goals were chosen.

Since area planning was only the beginning phase, focus group members also expressed considerable reservation about what would happen next. Generally they believed expectations had been raised for real change in outcome; they expected and wanted a dynamic feedback loop which would clearly inform them about the team plans, the vice president's council plan, and what would happen ultimately with the president's council. Troy stated that, "doubters want to know; they have got to have feedback. The loop back through is going to be critical for 'buy-in.'" They wished to understand what they could do locally. They wanted clear explanations for prioritizing decisions as those decisions continue to get honed. They looked for new patterns in resource allocation.

Respondents felt good about involvement and learning more about their areas and others' areas. One participant said, "it felt good to be asked to contribute and to feel that what I said was valued." Another said, "I was reminded that we are all on the same journey." Several commented on a good feeling of collaboration as groups agreed together to address certain pressing needs and allow others to be postponed or placed as lower priorities. The process provided time to vent. One member said, "it got my division talking again about key issues and now we are setting aside time regularly to continue these discussions."

In conclusion, the focus groups liked what happened, but were cautious about what the results and follow through would be.

Question 5: How do you think strategic planning can create change? The response to this question elicited remarks about guarded optimism. The good will and good faith which emerged in this process must to be nurtured and honored. The process appeared to be exciting and challenging, inspiring hope and faith, but it needs much work to be streamlined and effective, and the risks are high if the process falls apart. One associate dean stated:

> There is still a lot of cynicism about the process and whether it will really change anything. People need to see changes in order to continue putting forth the energy to make the process work. Are we going to move forward,

> or is this just another "quality circle" project? Are people truly being listened to and heard? Is it futile? Many people have adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

Although much team building occurred or was initiated, these feelings did not exist in all areas. Consensus at all levels and across areas had not yet been achieved. Participants noted that the planning process had already contributed to the quality of life as planners began to focus on goals that require no additional moneys, such as improved communications, relationships, and strategies for quality. One theme that was expressed was that the new strategic planning process demands strong, clear leadership for execution, for making it a living process, for creating effective feedback loops, for facilitating group process, and for giving direction and providing support. The leadership team needs skills training and reinforcement to fulfill these expectations.

Peer Debriefing Summary

Feedback from the focus groups suggested that there was redundancy and confusion in the terms used on the strategic planning form and that the form contained too much jargon. Thus, it apparent that the language used on the form was a block to good communication and thinking. Terms need to be clarified so that response will be better differentiated, creating better thinking and less redundancy. For example, there was a great deal of discussion in the focus groups about the use of the word *customer*. Then, there was also confusion about goals, objectives, and measurements. It was apparent to several participants that because educators have their own language, the specialized business strategic planning terms used in the process were inappropriate to this application.

Focus group members generally liked being asked to participate in a focus group, enjoyed being asked their opinions and reactions. Sally declared, "Pleased to see a good mix of people at this focus group." A strong theme in the focus group was "a wait and see" attitude. One participant expressed this attitude: "Is this just another tool in the tool box? If it is ignored like the other fads, then a lot of people will have their morale affected."

Ethnograph Analysis: Reactions by Department

The diversity of disciplines of thought and training among the various units were clearly reflected in the way they organized themselves for this strategic planning process. It was clear in reviewing the videotape transcripts that disciplines operated from different paradigms and in different modalities. Using the transcriptions and aided by the Ethnograph software, I was able to discover patterns in the process used in the different disciplines.

Visual arts. The key for this group was the mission. The most powerful part of the strategic planning exercise, the piece that brought them together as a division, was the development of a division mission statement. One instructor from the visual arts division commented, "I like the analogy of traveling. Where do you want to go? Before you deal with the travel itself, you must know where you want to go." One member reported that upon completion of the mission statement a staff member created a beautiful wall poster with the statement, and it was displayed in the visual arts gallery for an open house. Once the division defined its mission, the group was able to handle the strategic planning goals and action plans. One facilitator asked a visual arts staff person if the group developed any goals based on this mission statement. The staff member's reply was, "What do you mean by goals?" His priority was clearly the mission statement. For him the mission statement was the essence of the plan, the salient feature of his experience.

The person responsible for the form input to the computer for this division was new to the division and extremely frustrated with her assigned task. The heart of her frustration was, "one manager didn't like the form, so he made up a new one of his own for his division, which meant that the plans didn't fit the screen when I tried to input." Clearly, the visual arts division had a different sense of boundaries and rules than other divisions.

Financial aid.

> What really worked was the form, but it did need clarifications. What we didn't like about the form was that everybody used it differently. Made it very frustrating since we spent lots of time to complete the form and other units didn't bother. I tried to look up other department plans (on the computer database) for guidance in the completing, but nobody else had followed the rules. I don't want training, give me the package and have everyone play by the same rules.

Financial aid is an area that lives and dies by rules and compliance. It is no wonder that the manager in this area was so frustrated. He did not feel the form should be used as a flexible tool.

Business and computer division. The group went through a storming exercise in the spring. The explanation given, "We had many curmudgeons on board." After much deliberation, they returned to the task at hand in the computer lab. The group assigned three sub-groups. Staff were all on line, allowing them to think, compose, and input at the same time. "The document was in WordPerfect. The group composed the mission statement together on the network, in the same room. We could watch the words unfold on the screen, and make changes as new ideas came together." In a very animated monologue, Jennie explained how "we didn't have to look at a bunch of papers and erase and cut and paste and carry them around and then re-type, we were able to look at the screen and think." Thus, the use of technology was a powerful component in the success of their division, and they were much less concerned with the terminology and more concerned with implementation. As a result of their approach and success, the staff were optimistic and hopeful that this strategic planning process was a positive change for the college.

Health, physical education, recreation, athletics, and aquatics. "We spent time getting to know each other, each other's strengths and weaknesses. This helped us later on to get the work done." Most of the members of this group are coaches of athletic teams, and their process reflected their normal way of working. Their approach started with team building and assessment of individual contributions. Each step involved everyone, consensus was important, and everything was done step-by-step with as fair and open a process as possible. The Associate Dean of this area, who was responsible for the plan, stated that the division had "a teamwork approach. It was time consuming, but necessary."

Business office. Two members of the SPC steering committee facilitated the group in a 4-hour retreat session. The session was held on campus in the summer. The facilitators were comfortable with the language of the form and used that language sparingly when it got in the way of good thinking. After 4 hours, this group of 20 staff had developed three goals, the essence of the mission statement, and what they needed to fill in on the form. In this division, there was a strong task-orientation with a group that was comfortable with detail. In a subsequent meeting, they met, completed the form, and had a plan for next year.

Language and literature. "We were hung up on meanings, to the science department a tree is a tree, here we ask what does the tree mean. We had to find the hidden meaning in the whole process." The department found the process of dialogue with one another so interesting they decided to formalize this part of their encounter. The Associate Dean commented, "the most important result of the process was that now the division gets together for colloquium once a month to sit down and argue with each other." The language of the document was a great issue. "Aesthetically, we just bristle at the use of the word customer."

Industrial technology. "We are so task-oriented we just want to get to the back page and fill it out. We know what we are doing." This group, which described itself as "very concrete" in its thinking, found that the purchasing of equipment was its driving force because equipment needs are critical to their success. Much of their time was spent on working through the 5-year equipment list, prioritizing the equipment for the division, and then writing the goals based on the priority equipment needs. The process led to a better understanding of each other's areas.

Telecommunications and library. The form frustrated a librarian. "It all seemed so redundant on the form, goal measurement and outcome. I'm trained to think as an educator, in terms of objectives, the student will learn "xyz" and be able to "ABC" at an 80% level of accuracy. It was crazy to have it all separated out."

Social science."We had a lively start, tremendous amount of verbal exchange." They used an SPC steering committee member as a facilitator, giving him the title of expert. "The expert came to our division to explain the form, but the initial storm drove the expert out." The division then met several times to clear the air. Eventually the division members agreed upon the need to develop a strategy to get their work done, and as a group, they chose a team strategy. "There was greater likelihood of a goal rising to the top if they functioned as a team." The division's new Associate Dean was the facilitator. "It was not my option, it was their idea. I was flexible."

Personnel. This unit had been piloting TQM techniques and used some of its new strategies for the planning process. Their plan was a large piece of butcher paper covered in a semi-pattern of yellow sticky notes, hung on the wall by the copy machine. The plan was in view of everyone who came into the personnel back office. The department members continually contributed to the plan by adding and moving the sticky notes.

These summaries clearly reveal the contrasting methods used by different units to accomplish their strategic planning. How focus group members from each discipline spoke about their experiences was certainly influenced by the social construction of their realities. For strategic planning process, it is essential to recognize that the discipline constructs work much like cultural differences and that these can become a barrier if only one template, the strategic planning form, is used to systematize work. Thus, adaptability will be critical in the initiation of this new process.

Ethnograph Analysis: Types of Participants

The two dominant feelings of participants in the strategic planning process were frustration and optimism. Participants in the focus groups fit into a continuum on both a frustration and an optimism scale, with participants in distinct camps. I tried to substitute the word commitment, but the language from the transcripts dictated I use optimism. Figure 5 is a 2-by-2 grid of the four groupings that developed from the feelings expressed by participants. I have used the participant quotes to capture the essence of each quadrant. The 2-by-2 matrix described here is very similar to the model proposed by Nutt and Backoff (1987) described in Chapter II. In their model, however, the matrix was formed by the stakeholder's importance and by their position with respect to a course of action, not by level of frustration and optimism in the process. The four quadrants Nutt and Backoff (1987) describe are: (a) unimportant/oppose = problematic; (b) important/oppose = antagonistic; (c) unimportant/support = low priority; and (d) important/support = supporters. These four categories have some correlation with the current findings but there are distinct differences.

What follows is the description of each quadrant in my grid using the participant's own words.

Low *Optimism* High

Frustration		
High	CURMUDGEON *High Frustration/Low Optimism* "Crotchety, Old, and Tired" Been through this before attitude Strategic planning is a low priority Thing to keep Management busy Complained about time line Feared the process would change soon Uncertain about process	GUARDED OPTIMIST *High Frustration/High Optimism* Raised expectations about planning Wait and see attitude Anxious Talked a lot about the form Excited about college goals Optimistic about institutional direction
Low	ALONG FOR THE RIDE *Low Frustration/Low Optimism* Planning is a low priority Neutral about process Not involved, missed meetings May only have been involved in input	CRUSADER *Low Frustration/High Optimism* Excited about teamwork Constructive criticism of form Sees potential for college as a whole Interested in institutional direction Systems oriented in process Comfortable with planning language Familiar with strategic planning

Figure 5

Types of Participants

Curmudgeon: High frustration/low optimism. The dyed-in-the-wool curmudgeons mostly include those staff members who have been on campus for several years and have seen many management fads come and go. They describe themselves as "old, crotchety, and tired," and believed they have seen it all. They remember all the last projects and feel, "its hard to get your head up again, especially when it takes away from what you should be doing, getting ready for the school year." They figure this is just some new-fangled process that management is trying out, so they adopt a hard core wait-and-see stance. As Gill stated, "There is still a lot of cynicism about the process and whether it will really change anything. People need to see changes to continue putting forth the energy to make the process work." Many faculty members were in this group, which managers were not willing to admit to being members of this group. Curmudgeons are not likely to take the process too seriously, thinking either that it will not change anything or that there will be a different process next year. As Barb reiterated, "just another tool in the tool box. If it is ignored like the other fads, then a lot of people will have their morale affected." Hence, they are reluctant to "play the game," although they will play along as long as it amuses them. Curmudgeons are people with serious doubts and are the number one critics of administration in departments where planning efforts have been awkward or poorly structured.

Guarded optimist: High frustration/high optimism. This group was the dominant group. One guarded optimist stated, "this process has a lot of promise, but we won't know until we see." Jan put it another way when she said she was "frustrated/hopeful." This group was frustrated with the process. "Where will my individual goal go; will it just be lost in the process?" was a common question. At the same time, these participants stated that they had raised expectations that their hard work could pay off. The guarded optimists were the most aggravated by the short time line, the cumbersomeness of the strategic planning form, and they wanted the strategic planning process to work and they wanted to do a good job, but they felt there just was not enough time. Rick said, "It's got potential but, it needs work." Still, they showed their optimism in their belief that next year would be much easier and less frustrating. Their expectations were that even though there was a lot at risk, this new strategic planning process could bring about a positive change. Steve's comments were, "I have a sense that this time it is different. I think this process can make a difference."

Along for the ride: Low frustration/low optimism. Planning was a low priority for this group. Nancy put it this way: "It is very hard for me to think this way, the long term. As long as I have what I need to do my job, that's all that I usually care about." Not involved much in the process, they may have missed a couple of meetings, may have been involved only in inputting the plan in the computer, and they are neither negative nor enthusiastic. They were not really engaged.

Crusaders: Low frustration/high optimism. This group believed strategic planning was important and could make a difference. They were interested in the team processes and familiar with strategic planning from some settings or training. Troy said, "It was a great process because it made each of us aware of the others in our division and where we fit in." Crusaders brought constructive criticism to the form and the process. This group was ready to lead the charge.

The four quadrants Nutt and Backoff (1987) describe are (a) unimportant/oppose = problematic; (b) important/oppose = antagonistic; (c) unimportant/support = low priority; and (d) important/support = supporters. These four categories correlate with the current findings. The *guarded optimist* may be seen as problematic. The strategy needed to win over these participants would be to lower their frustration by refining the process, increase training and increasing feedback loops. The *curmudgeon* may be seen as antagonistic. The same strategies may help sway these participants, but it is less likely to be successful. The *along for the ride* group are a match with Nutt and Backoff's (1987) low priority group. They are not interested and have no need to contribute. They find the process unimportant, but they will support it versus actively opposing it like the curmudgeons. The last group, the *crusaders*, is equivalent to Nutt and Backoff's supporters, but in this model they may contribute leadership in the process regardless of their particular position in the organization.

STAGE FOUR: REFINED PROCESS AND FOLLOW-UP SURVEY
(September 1994 - June 1995)

Following the focus groups, the council turned their energies toward refining the process (see Table 6, Chronology of the Study). This meant making revisions to the strategic planning form and creating a supplemental glossary to clarify terminology.

Glossary to Accompany the Strategic Planning Form

Feedback from the focus groups suggested that there was redundancy and confusion in the terms used in the strategic planning form so I led a subcommittee of the SPC to design a glossary. The goal of producing the glossary was to minimize frustration and increase users' understanding of how to complete the form. One problem focus groups identified was that the form was too full of jargon. It was apparent that the foreign language used in the form was a block to good communication and thinking, so terms needed to be clarified so that responses would be better differentiated, leading to better thinking and less redundancy (see Appendix C). There was confusion about goals, objectives, and measurements, the SPC committee felt attaching the institutional effectiveness guidelines from AACC (Appendix A) would aid the consistency in this area. Discussing the parameters of the glossary was a good exercise to review what the council wanted the units to get out of the process. The members found it challenging to explore how a new form and glossary possibly structured thinking to create a better end product.

All Staff Strategic Planning Training (May 4, 1994)

A meeting was scheduled in May 1994 to encourage the units to begin their planning for the next academic year in the spring. This was a result of the feedback from the focus groups about the time crunch of doing the planning during inservice, right before fall term started. In the focus groups meetings, faculty complained that this "management stuff" took them away from their primary focus of preparing for the coming school year. Additionally, the pilot groups had said that they felt advantaged by having started their planning earlier than the beginning of fall term. Managers were asked to come to this May 1994 meeting and bring one other representative from their area. The session was well attended: most areas were represented with two or more people.

Our first step was to give participants an overview of the phases of strategic management (Appendix D). This overview was designed to give participants the sense that the plan was greater than the sum of the individual parts. The next critical area was to educate staff on the differences between goals, objectives, and measurements. Lastly we provided examples of good and bad goal statements. Marge and I developed a worksheet for participants to design a plan for their unit's planning process. At the close of the session participants were encouraged to complete their planning worksheet. The purpose of the training session goal was to have every planning unit leave with a well thought out plan to complete their work. Council members circulated through the audience as support staff to answer any questions participants might have.

Most of the evaluation efforts conducted by the SPC previously had been concerned with the process side of strategic planning. Preparing for this meeting was the first time I had gone through all of the department plans. I was astonished how poorly written they were: the plans were not really coherent and there was tremendous confusion about what a goal was as compared to an objective and a measurement.

Follow-up Survey

The SPC requested a pencil and paper feedback questionnaire be conducted in 1995, anticipating that this vehicle would provide them numbers, viewgraphs, and the ability to compare results from year to year. The argument was that the written questionnaire would also enable more staff to contribute feedback. I chaired a subcommittee that designed a written questionnaire and decide on the topic areas that needed to be addressed. The subcommittee pinpointed questions about areas of concern mentioned in the focus groups. Additionally, the council wanted to assess progress toward meeting the guidelines of Institutional Effectiveness as outlined by the AACC (Appendix A). Each committee member was assigned a topic area and asked to write questions pertaining to that topic. It very difficult to draft a questionnaire by committee, because members had varying degrees of expertise in questionnaire construction. It was a frustrating way to work, but the input and insight brought about by the different perspectives was invaluable to the success of the feedback survey. The pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted in December 1994. Many comments were made for improvement. I designed the final draft of the questionnaire with the aid of a research assistant from Computer Services, and the questionnaire was coded and distributed to the entire staff in February 1995 (see Appendix E).

STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL FEEDBACK SURVEY

The SPC questionnaire consisted of 46 questions regarding staff members' experiences with the strategic planning process. Most of the questions could be answered by choosing *yes, no, don't know*, or indicating the level of agreement with statements using a

5-point scale of 1 = *Disagree* to 5 = *Agree*. Four questions appearing at the end of the questionnaire required open-ended responses. The number of completed questionnaires received totaled 220 for a return rate of 49%.

Each questionnaire was uniquely numbered prior to distribution. The numbers were coded to establish return rates and aided in the data entry process. Demographic questions were included within the questionnaire so that the analysis could be done by employee group. A spreadsheet template was made using Excel software; each question was given a column and each respondent a row. Support staff in the Research and Planning Office completed the data entry. A spreadsheet was produced for the entire questionnaire results, breakdowns for each question were analyzed and cross tabulations were then made by department and by employee group. A research assistant and I went through the analysis question by question to develop a narrative. A member of the SPC and I repeated the procedure. This process resulted in a triangulation that was important in determining the salient patterns.

The open-ended questions were handled in a different manner. Answers to the questions were transcribed verbatim. Each question had a list of answers. The lists were distributed to a member of the Strategic Planning Council, a research assistant, and me. Individually, we determined themes and categories of responses for each of the questions, then we met as a group and compared our themes. After agreeing upon themes, we coded each of the responses for each of the questions. The data were then sorted matching our codes for ease of use in the narrative report. A cross tabulation was made of this document to the demographic information in order to detect patterns of response by category.

The research assistant, SPC member, and I analyzed the overall results individually, then I met with each separately and wrote the final institutional report with their input. The research assistant was particularly helpful with her research expertise, while the Strategic Planning Council member offered a history of the institution and organizational development expertise. This resulted in a balance of expertise and interpretation for the triangulation.

Participation in the Strategic Planning Process

Staff participation was stable over the 2-year period of the initiation of the participatory strategic planning process. In the first year, 83% of the respondents participated in the strategic planning process and 81% of the respondents participated in the second year. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that collaborative processes were used in their departments to prioritize goals. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that the new strategic planning processes supported teamwork. A majority of respondents reported that their immediate supervisor kept them informed of the institution-wide strategic planning processes, and that they were familiar with their area's completed strategic plan. When respondents were asked, "What was the one thing that worked best in the strategic planning process?" 45 of the 115 responses mentioned teamwork and the use of collaborative decision-making.

Time

The majority of respondents (57%) reported that they started working on the second year's plan in Fall Term. The same percentage of respondents said they spent approximately 3 to 10 hours working on the Strategic Plan; two-thirds of these indicated they had only spent 3 to 5 hours. Forty-five percent of respondents felt that their area's planning process took less time in 1994 than it did in 1993, while 35% of the respondents did not know if the process took more or less time when compared to the previous year. When respondents were asked what they did not like about strategic planning there were 26 written comments concerning time and timing. These respondents felt that the planning took too much time, they did not have time to do it, and that the timing the week before classes began was poor. Several faculty commented that strategic planning should be an ongoing process and not just once a year. Only 5 respondents wanted to eliminate strategic planning. However, 39% of the respondents agreed and somewhat agreed that strategic planning was a waste of time. Thirty-two percent believed that it was simply the latest management tool that would go away soon.

Training Sessions

Overall, 54% of the respondents attended a strategic planning training session. While faculty was the largest employee group, they were the least likely to have attended a training session or feel that their training was adequate. Forty-five percent of the faculty felt they need additional training, while 18% of the mangers agreed they needed additional training.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were aware that a glossary of terms was available for use with the strategic planning form. Of those who were aware of the glossary, 45% felt neutral about its helpfulness in completing the strategic planning process.

Institutional Process and the Budget

While 65% of management respondents agreed that strategic planning had refined strategic thinking in their area. Only one-third (33%) of the support staff agreed and even fewer faculty agreed (30%). There was greater agreement that strategic planning focuses on meeting the needs of students/customers: 71% of managers agreed, 50% of faculty agreed, and 43% of support staff agreed.

A majority of respondents to the survey (69%) reported that their area goals were clearly linked to the institutional goals. However, there was a mixed response to the question that indicated their understanding of what happened to the area plan once it was completed. Sixty-four percent of the managers indicated that they understood what happened to the area plan after it was turned into their dean. This level of understanding about the processing of the entire institutional plan was lower among support staff (41%), and even lower among faculty (31%). Another area of confusion lay in the relationship between strategic planning and the budget process. Fifty-two percent of the respondents reported that the strategic planning process was not clearly linked to institutional budget decisions. The most common written responses (42 of 91) regarding changes needed to the strategic planning process echoed the view that strategic planning needed to be more clearly linked to the overall budget process.

Summary of the Survey Results

Faculty and support staff believed they needed additional training in Strategic Planning geared specifically to meet their needs. In comparison, managers felt they had adequate training. The planning process took less time in most areas the second year, but it was not clear that this time was well spent. The overall impact of the strategic planning effort was not clear to respondents, but the process had contributed to their sense of teamwork. Respondents felt that their area goals were linked to institutional goals and that their strategic planning had caused them to focus on their customers. There was clear evidence that the staff needed a better understanding of the overall institutional strategic planning process and how it relates to the budget process.

CHAPTER V

HYPOTHESES, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> Any effort to assess and improve institutional effectiveness must begin with the faculty, staff, administration and governing board of the college. No community college can be truly effective without vital and committed personnel. Community colleges should strive to promote professional development and a dynamic organizational culture. This can only be accomplished within an environment of trust and honesty, both in institutional processes and interpersonal relations. (American Association of Community Colleges, 1992, p. 1)

The intent of this study was to explore the perceptions of staff involved in a participatory strategic planning process at one community college. The investigation followed the planning process at NWCC for a 3-year period. It was hoped this investigation would better inform community college mangers who develop participatory planning processes. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What did participants value in a participatory strategic planning process?
2. What did participants find to be a hindrance to participation in this strategic planning process?
3. What strategies encouraged and sustained participation in this strategic planning process?

A qualitative study does not begin with a theory to confirm or refute; the purpose is to form a theory. In this process, the researcher must allow herself to be led by and learn from respondents. The researcher becomes an interpreter of voices, rather than a tester of hypotheses. While the research questions are used to guide the study, the goal of the study is not only to answer these specific questions but to develop hypotheses to guide further research and contribute to the development of theory.

HYPOTHESES

This qualitative study generated four hypotheses that relate to the purpose of this study:

1. Staff participation in an organization's strategic planning process results in a deeper staff understanding of the organization's mission, a higher staff commitment to the organization's goals, and a demonstration of greater staff energy and vitality.

2. Community college departments will interpret and implement institutional strategic planning processes in ways that are unique and congruent with their academic discipline; a single process cannot be successfully dictated.

3. When managers serve as facilitators or use others to facilitate strategic planning processes, staff will self-organize, a process will emerge, and leadership will take a variety of forms.

4. Community college staff who encounter change in strategic planning processes can be categorized as *Guarded Optimists*, *Curmudgeons*, *Crusaders*, or *Along for the Ride*, based on levels of frustration and optimism.

DISCUSSION

Mission, Commitment, and Vitality

Staff participation in an unit's strategic planning process results in a deeper staff understanding of the organization's mission and vision, a higher staff commitment to organizations goals, and a demonstration of greater staff energy and vitality. In this study, more than 80% of the staff were involved in strategic planning in the first 2 years the participative process was initiated. The SPC minutes reported that responses to the participative process were uniformly positive, that the participative process had engendered a high level of involvement, participation, team building, and energy. Council members reported that as a result of the discussions that were generated during the planning process, there was a deeper understanding of the purpose and direction within each planning unit. The inclusive nature of the process contributed to a unified sense of purpose and team building within the planning units. "The communication was great! A first for our division. It was a great process because it made each of us aware of the others in our division and where we fit in." Furthermore, a majority of the participants saw a clear connection between their unit goals and the institutional goals.

Reaching consensus on area goals also contributed to staff members having a deeper understanding of one another's work and to team building in general. When asked, "What was the one thing that worked best in the strategic planning process?" the majority of the responses related to the collaborative decision-making processes and increased teamwork. Participants felt heard and valued. "We've been heard, the college is listening."

Participants found value in a process that prompted more detailed thinking, and pride in working through priorities successfully.

> For the first time my area was included in the strategic planning process. Even though everyone's goals were not included in the final area plan, the 'buy-in' felt better to everyone because they had all been given a chance to input their ideas and needs. It's very important to understand the rationale regarding why certain goals were chosen.

Adaptability of Strategic Planning Process to Meet the Needs of Different Disciplines

This study found that community college departments will interpret and implement institutional strategic planning processes in ways that are unique and congruent with their academic discipline; a single process cannot be successfully dictated.

In the systems thinking model proposed by Wheatley (1993), work is structured as flexible projects, and people are multi-skilled and continually adapting. It is important for a consistent process to be established throughout an institution so that similar and comparable work can be accomplished. However, this study found that it is likewise important that the process (and planning templates) be adaptable and flexible enough to meet the needs of the different units.

In this study, the strategic planning template served as the flexible tool. "We used the form as a guide, not as a rule. Our understanding was that the form could be kind of fluid. It was much more fun than prior years." The template prompted all groups to think deeply about purpose, assumptions, priorities and constituents, accountability, and timing, without dictating the unit's process.

Not all the managers in this study felt comfortable with this flexibility.

> What really worked was the form (template), but it did need clarifications. What I didn't like about the form was that everybody used it differently. Made it very frustrating since we spent lots of time to complete the form other units didn't bother. I tried to look up other department plans (on the computer database) for guidance in the completing, but nobody else had followed the rules. I don't want training, give me the package and have everyone play by the same rules.

Some participants were resistant to the use of certain terms on the form. "I sure didn't like some of the terminology, especially the 'customer' term used to apply to students." It was uncomfortable for many planning units to use business terms in describing educational services. Terminology is critical and needs to be acceptable to all the units before beginning the planning process. Time needs to be spent developing a common understanding of terms to be used in a participatory planning process.

This study revealed there was a considerable contrast in the processes different units used to accomplish their strategic planning task. Clear patterns emerged from how the individual disciplines spoke about their experiences. Is it any wonder that the art department and the business and computer division had a different method for completing the same task? The social construction of their realities is much different. The discipline constructs, much like cultural differences, can become barriers when trying to systematize work across disciplines using only one template, the *strategic planning form*. Adaptability was critical in this participative strategic planning process.

Facilitator/Catalyst

This study found that when managers serve as facilitators or use others to facilitate strategic planning processes, staff will self-organize, a process will emerge, and leadership will take a variety of forms.

In the three pilot processes, which were facilitator led, the groups self-organized to work through the first half of the form collaboratively. The groups chose to work together on the mission, vision, customers served, and defining goals for the units. Subgroups emerged through self -selection to finish detail work of filling out the form. In each case the groups participated willingly and expressed that they felt acknowledged because they were allowed to control their own process. These activities reinforced the planning assumptions at NWCC:

- Through full integration of strategic planning methods, measurement and accountability will emerge from those who are directly involved in each specific area.
- With greater staff participation in the planning process, the college district could be assured of better decisions for deeper understanding of, and higher commitment to, implementation of area action plans. (NWCC Mission to Measurement, 1991)

This participatory process allowed college members to contribute based on their personal strengths. An unanticipated benefit of the participatory process was that units developed goals that did not require additional resources. "My area was surprised to find that the majority of our goals can be accomplished without additional money. We are excited about that and feel it is a positive idea for the staff and one they can move forward on, even if their goals are not incorporated into the campus-wide strategic plan."

In this case, facilitator training was inconsistent and in some units insufficient. "What didn't work was the way it was presented. It is such a new process but the tendency is to make this year's plan like last year's. A single presentation to everyone at once would have helped a lot." Facilitators who did the early pilot planning were advantaged. Facilitators who received one day of orientation and training felt more satisfied. In some cases, managers who tried to function as a facilitator did not have a clear grasp of the process and task. They were unfamiliar with terminology. "Managers didn't fully understand the need to train the facilitator."

This study demonstrates that the implementation of a participatory strategic planning process is not as simple as it may appear. Using systems thinking in a reductionist organization is a paradox in itself. Shashkin and Kiser (1993) acknowledge that "at the slightest sign of difficulty executives often start circling the wagons and attempt to use the new paradigm approaches in old-fashioned ways" (p. 47). This retreat in style is driven by fear of change and the need to maintain or recapture control. During a time of change, the old ways of doing business may seem the only way to achieve this efficiency. The change, or more properly, transition - a discontinuous, qualitative shift rather than merely a quantitative one - can be so frightening that individuals return to what is comfortable or what has worked in the past, even though this approach is no longer appropriate. Feedback loops and sharing success stories through training would be one strategy to bridge this gap for managers to gain confidence in facilitating participative processes.

Frustration and Optimism

This study discovered that community college staff who encounter change in strategic planning processes can be categorized as follows: *Guarded Optimists, Curmudgeons, Crusaders,* or *Along for the Ride*. These categories reflect a continuum of two dominant themes: frustration and optimism.

Insufficient time was a prominent source of frustration. Many participants experienced frustration with the pressure of deadlines, the need for reflective thinking and discussion, and the lack of time needed to become thoroughly oriented to the new process. Many acknowledged that year-long strategic planning could ease up the annual fall term planning frenzy.

Since area planning was only the beginning phase, focus group members also expressed considerable frustration about what would happen next. Generally they believed expectations had been raised for real change in outcome. They expected and wanted a dynamic feedback loop. They wished to be clearly informed about the team plans, the vice president's council plan, and what would happen ultimately with the president's council. "Doubters want to know; they have got to have feedback. The loop back through is going to be critical for 'buy-in.'"

Feelings of frustration and optimism showed evidence of guarded optimism. Participants hoped the participative strategic planning process would have leadership to make it a living process, effective feedback loops to make it sustainable, and facilitation to give groups direction. "The leadership team needs skills training and reinforcement to fulfill these expectations. The good will and good faith which emerged in this process needs to be nurtured and honored." "There is still a lot of cynicism about the process and whether it will really change anything . . . many people have adopted a wait-and-see attitude."

The 2 by 2 matrix used in Figure 5 is similar to the model proposed by Nutt and Backoff (1987). However, the Nutt and Backoff matrix was constructed based on the stakeholder's importance in the organization, by their position of support with respect to a course of action, not by level of frustration and optimism in the process. In this study, with its emphasis on participation, all participants are assumed important in the organization, and leadership is considered multi-dimensional rather than position-dependent. Likewise, it is not a matter so much of participants taking a stance of support or opposition, but rather, participants having a sense of the outcome either being worth the effort or not that determines their sense of optimism.

Guarded optimist: High frustration/high optimism. This group was the dominant group. "This process has a lot of promise, but we won't know until we see." These participants had raised expectations that their hard work could pay off. The guarded optimist is seen as problematic in the Nutt and Backoff (1987) model. The strategy in working with the guarded optimist would be to lower the frustration level by refining the process, increase training, and increase feedback loops.

The guarded optimists were the most aggravated by the short time line of the process and the cumbersomeness of the strategic planning form. They wanted the strategic planning process to work, and they wanted to do a good job, but they felt there just was not enough time. "It's got potential, but it needs work." They were optimistic that next year would be much less frustrating. Their expectations were that even though there was a lot at risk with this new strategic planning process, it could bring about a positive change. "I have a sense that this time it is different. I think this process can make a difference."

There were more participants in the guarded optimist quadrant than the other three quadrants. The success of the planning effort in the coming years will be dependent upon responding to this group's concerns. If this group is not heard, they can become curmudgeons. If this group's needs are met, they can become crusaders.

Curmudgeon: High frustration/low optimism. The curmudgeon is similar to the antagonistic category in the Nutt and Backoff (1987) model. These staff members have seen many management fads come and go. They describe themselves as "old, crotchety, and tired." They remember all the last projects, and it fuels their frustration. "Its hard to get your head up again, especially when it takes away from what you should be doing - getting ready for the school year." Curmudgeons are a hard core wait-and-see group. They are not optimistic that there will be positive change. Hence, they are reluctant to play the game. Curmudgeons are people with serious doubts. They are the primary critics of leadership in departments where planning efforts have been awkward or poorly structured. Curmudgeons may become less antagonistic when there is more time devoted to planning, when the process is well thought out by the manager of the unit, and when there are consistent feedback loops in place. Ultimately, it may be impossible to meet a curmudgeon's needs except through peer pressure.

Along for the ride: Low frustration/low optimism. Planning was a low priority for this group. "It is very hard for me to think this way, the long-term. As long as I have what I need to do my job, that's all that I usually care about." They were neither negative nor enthusiastic; they were not really engaged in the process. This group correlated with the Nutt and Backoff (1987) quadrant called low priority. This group was a small portion of this population, and was never critical to the process of the entire group, as long as they were always given the option to participate.

Crusaders: Low frustration/high optimism. This group believed strategic planning was important and could make a difference; they were similar to the supporters in the Nutt and Backoff (1987) model. They were interested in the team processes and were usually familiar with strategic planning from some other setting or training. Crusaders brought constructive criticism to the template and the process. They were ready to lead the charge and develop strategies to lower frustrations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Practice

This study was a snapshot in time of a community college's implementation of a participatory strategic planning process. The following are five recommendations for practice that emerged from this case:

1. Obtain acceptance of terminology from all units before beginning the participatory strategic planning process. Use acceptable terms in form/templates and in facilitation.

2. Do not dictate a single process for strategic planning across all disciplines. Design forms and processes that are adaptable to differences in styles of critical thinking.

3. Use facilitators to assist units in the participatory strategic planning effort. Train the facilitators to work in ways that empower participants.

4. Reduce participant frustration and increase optimism by providing sufficient time, creating sustainable feedback loops, both of which demonstrate that the unit manager has thought through the process.

5. Increase participation in strategic planning processes to gain deeper understanding of the organization's mission, higher commitments to organizational goals, and a demonstration of greater energy and vitality.

Recommendations for Further Study

What are the implications of these findings for other planning processes in the community college, e.g., program evaluation, curriculum development, and or self-study for accreditation? Many of the processes at these institutions require analytical thinking, group processing, and strategic thinking. If an institution has learned to conduct participatory strategic planning, would it become more efficient and effective in similar group tasks? Further study would be needed.

What is the impact of a participatory strategic planning process on the climate of the institution over time? Does participation have positive, negative, or little impact on the climate of the organization? This study suggests that with greater staff participation and greater alignment of mission and goals a more vital organization would emerge, and a more positive climate would result. A climate survey may be a type of research which would help us understand this phenomenon.

It would be interesting to learn what types of staff development programs foster participatory decision-making. How do groups learn to function more proficiently in this model? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do participants need to become comfortable with this type of decision-making? How could this proficiency be measured to give participants feedback about their skill development?

It would be important to have a better understanding of what specific facilitation skills are needed by managers to lead participatory planning processes. How can managers learn to let go and allow their staff to self organize? How can mangers learn to suspend beliefs and allow process to emerge? The understanding of these facilitation skills could improve management development models.

EPILOGUE

It is important in any story to create a sense of closure, while simultaneously recognizing it as part of an ongoing process. Hence the importance of this epilogue.

Following the final stage of this study there was one more annual cycle of the strategic planning process described in this research. There were follow up questions included in a climate survey conducted by an outside agency for NWCC in January of 1996. The data from follow up questions were consistent with the previous written survey that I had been so intimately involved with, i.e., teamwork was supported, and people felt that their goals were connected to the institutional goals and that their planning unit's mission was in alignment with the institutional mission. By June of 1996, the make up of the President's Council was radically changed; five of the original members left the organization: one death and four retirements. The vice president became the interim president.

By the next fall a new board was elected: four of the seven were replaced and a new president was selected. Finances and accountability became the mandated focus of the board for the new leader. The staff and organizational development office was cut, the director of personnel retired, and two more staff positions were eliminated. The Strategic Planning Council was directed by the president to re-write the mission statement and to replicate an operational planning model from the president's previous institution. I felt compelled to leave the council of new appointees to spend more time finishing my doctorate.

In the fall of 1997, the council fashioned five institutional goals and dispersed them to the planning units to be used as models for the units to write their strategic/operational goals. The president then called for preliminary budget hearings. In these meetings the Deans, CFO, and president sat behind large tables on one side of the room and the managers presented their budgets one at a time. As I sat there listening I had a dejavu. Each manager came before the president's council and stated his or her case for the need of resources. Each spoke of the tremendous good work that could be done with just a few more dollars and the alternative of doom and gloom without the dollars. I was exhausted by these sad tales. My skin prickled as I approached the president's council, as I too was hoping to become *Queen for a Day*. Once this council had created the next year's budget, planning units were advised to take any initiatives out of their plans that were not funded. That was the end of strategic planning as we had known it at NWCC.

This most recent experience has given me a great deal of perspective, but it has not changed my world view. I am unfortunately a curmudgeon in this current setting; I work hard in my area and focus on the students that surround me. Institutional proceedings only frustrate me and lower my optimism. On the other hand, I will always be a crusader for participant empowerment and systems thinking. As the cycle continues on, I will wait for another opportunity to become engaged.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AACJC INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS GUIDELINES

the Consortium
FOR INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS & STUDENT SUCCESS . . .
in the Community College

AACJC POLICY STATEMENT ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

PREAMBLE

Community colleges are distinguished by their comprehensive and diverse educational missions, unique historical development and responsiveness to local circumstances, constituencies and communities. The concept of diversity in students, in community, in missions and in expectations is widely recognized. Consequently, there is no single definition of institutional effectiveness that encompasses the achievement of standards of excellence for all community colleges. This policy statement is based on the premise that there are, however, specific indicators which provide a means for measuring the effectiveness of community colleges.

MISSION STATEMENT

The foundation for institutional effectiveness in the community college is a comprehensive and current mission statement that expresses the purpose of the institution and the scope of institutional activity. A mission statement may also express the values, goals and expectations of the college as it relates to legal mandates, service needs and institutional diversity. The mission statement should be a driving force for strategic planning, ensuring continuous improvement in programs, assessing student outcomes and enhancing the purposefulness of the college.

THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

Any effort to assess and improve institutional effectiveness must begin with the faculty, staff, administration and governing board of the college. No community college can be truly effective without vital and committed personnel. Community colleges should strive to promote professional development and a dynamic organizational culture. This can only be accomplished within an environment of trust and honesty, both in institutional processes and interpersonal relations.

CEOs and board members have the most influence and responsibility for shaping the organizational culture. In particular the governing board is key to introducing, legitimizing and using effectiveness standards for the community college. Board and administration commitment to an "open" decision-making process which is nourished by valid, reliable and timely information lays the foundation for an involved and active faculty and staff. Such an internal culture cultivates respect and acts as a catalyst for empowering faculty and staff. This provides a solid base which allows staff to focus on student success and the development of partnerships with external groups. A dynamic and open culture promotes effectiveness and

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excellence throughout the college and enables more effective connections and collaboration with the external communities.

INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

Institutional structures and organizational patterns must allow for change and rapid response to constituent needs. In addition, institutional effectiveness can be assessed and enhanced through appropriate college processes that invite broad participation and active involvement. These processes include, but are not limited to:

> strategic planning, including environmental scanning to identify strengths and weaknesses, monitoring of accomplishments and efforts to initiate improvements, establishing a relationship between planning and the budget development process
>
> program review of both instructional and support areas, including strategies to enhance the teaching and learning process and development of new instructional programs
>
> professional development activities created with the active involvement of faculty and staff
>
> recruitment of qualified, credentialed personnel accompanied by regular programs of performance evaluation for all staff
>
> systems for institutional communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution
>
> fiscal responsibility based on systematic enrollment management and competence in acquiring, allocating and using resources
>
> an institutional research program which includes an assessment/evaluation system that relates student intentions to outcomes

INDICATORS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

An active, committed and caring college community, with an appropriate mission statement and effective institutional processes, provides the foundation upon which a strong institutional effectiveness program can be initiated and sustained. It is also critical that valid and accurate information should be accessible to and easily understood by all members of the college community. Such information should relate to the college's mission, provide an accounting of institutional decisions and serve as a basis for improvement and future planning.

Listed below are three broad areas with examples of measurement for institutional effectiveness. Although specific indicators will vary with local circumstances, all community colleges should be able to provide evidence and documentation of outcomes derived from their mission and consistent with the following areas of institutional effectiveness:

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STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND SUCCESS

- Student access to programs and services
- Assessment of basic skills of new students
- Student placement at appropriate educational level
- Student achievement of educational goals
- Student achievement of career goals, including additional education (transfer and advanced degrees), job success and licensure
- Institutional student retention rates appropriate to student educational objectives
- Student development of social, personal, cultural and ethical values

PROGRAM AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE

- Student satisfaction with learning programs
- Student use of and satisfaction with counseling and academic advising services
- Student use of and satisfaction with library, instructional support services and facilities
- Student use of and satisfaction with cultural and social experiences
- Community use of and satisfaction with college programs, services and facilities

COLLEGE PERFORMANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

- Participation by staff in community relations, partnerships and organizations
- Results of instructional program reviews
- Cultural diversity of staff and students
- Institution-wide student retention rates based on student intentions
- Student satisfaction with the college experience
- Employer satisfaction with student preparation
- Staff satisfaction with work and work life

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Learning and professional development opportunities for all staff

Recognition of staff performance, service, competence and creativity

Public perception and opinions of college performance

Review of institutional policy and organizational climate

From mission to outcomes, embracing institutional effectiveness as an intrinsic value should ensure institutional vitality. The design, implementation and maintenance of an institutional effectiveness program requires commitment of purpose, knowledge, expertise and wise use of resources. It requires vision and decision-making skills which anticipate change including external mandates for performance and reform. The truly effective organization will incorporate the anticipated future as part of its learning and planned change processes. Institutional effectiveness is a dynamic state made strong by fully informed, ongoing leadership and participation throughout the organization. The effective use of information, measurement indicators and outcomes finally determines the institution's fulfillment of its mission and purpose.

Approved AACJC Board of Directors
April 1992

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APPENDIX B

STRATEGIC PLANNING FORM

Northwest Community College
Strategic Planning Form
July 1993

I. UNIT MISSION

II. MAIN CUSTOMERS BEING SERVED

III. KEY ASSUMPTIONS FOR THE UNIT

  A.
  B.
  C.
  D.
  E.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS (both current and anticipated and in order of priority)

  A. Internal

    1. Strengths (what and why)

      a.
      b.
      c.
      d.
      e.

    2. Weaknesses (what and why)

      a.
      b.
      c.
      d.
      e.

  B. External

    1. Threats (what and why)

      a.
      b.
      c.
      d.
      e.

2. Opportunities (what and why)
    a.
    b.
    c.
    d.
    e.

V. GOALS (prioritized with longer term ones first)

A. Goal #1 (one sentence plus college mission statement addressed)

1. Narrative (description and what environmental condition is being addressed)
2. Outcome
3. Measurement
4. How will achieving this goal improving the college's effectiveness or efficiency?
5. Accomplishment date
6. Alternative strategies (and implications) to accomplish goal
    a.
    b.

Northwest Community College
Strategy Chosen and Reason
July 1993

Action Plan

1. Intermediate Actions/Time lines

   a. Step #1:

      What will be done?

      Who will do it?

      When will it be done?

   b. Step #2:

      What will be done?

      Who will do it?

      When will it be done?

   c. Step #3:

      What will be done?

      Who will do it?

      When will it be done?

      The "who" portion should include connections with other units, groups, teams, agencies, etc.

2. Resources Needed (narrative description)

   a. People

      $ (CA/NCA[*])

   b. Facilities

---

[*] CA = Currently Available; NCA = Not Currently Available.

$ (CA/NCA)

c. Time

$ (CA/NCA)

d. Equipment

$ (CA/NCA)

e. Materials

$ (CA/NCA)

f. Training

$ (CA/NCA)

g. Information

$ (CA/NCA)

h. Support

$ (CA/NCA)

Goal #2 (follow same as above)

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY TO GO WITH THE STRATEGIC PLANNING FORM

Glossary for the Strategic Planning Form

Benefits of Strategic Planning

1. Provides direction to the organization.
2. Encourages consistency in decision making.
3. Increases the likelihood of long-term organization success.

Mission

Mission is a statement that defines the business in terms of its services, markets, and technology. Mission defines the arena in which the business will operate , the needs it will meet and it's strategic approach to markets served.

Customer Analysis

* No matter what the organization's driving force, meeting the needs of the customer more effectively than the competition is the key to business success.

1. Who is the customer?
   a. Demographics
   b. Geographic region
   c. Any characteristics of the customer that bear on the service you provide.

2. What are their needs?

3. How will their needs be met?
   * Your service represents a solution to the customer's problem or need.

   a. Features- characteristics that meet the requirements of the customer.

   b. Benefits- How this service improves the well being of the customer.

Key Assumptions for the Unit

Those things that are essentially beyond individual/area control that have some impact on whether and sometimes, how goals are achieved.

Environmental Conditions

Two major components:

1. Internal Analysis

   Identify the strengths and weaknesses of an organization. Emphasize those strengths/ weakness related to key success factors.

   a. Assets: These are the human, physical and financial resources available to the organization.

   b. Skills/ Capabilities: These are what the organization is able to do, as demonstrated by actual performance.

2. External Analysis

   Identification of the opportunities and threats that may influence the organization's ability to achieve its objectives.

   a. Remote environment

      1. Technological
      2. Political
      3. Economic
      4. Social

   b. Operating environment

      1. Customers
      2. Competitors
      3. Suppliers - What effects our students coming here.
      4. Industry Standards

Goal Narrative:

The goal statement and narrative should pull the analysis together.

A goal can:

a. Use strengths to take advantage of an opportunity
b. Prepare us for, minimize or eliminate a threat
c. Address or fix a weakness
d. Enhance or acquire a strength
e. Combination of above

Goal statement characteristics:

- Related to NWCC mission, "mission driven"
- Related to important functions of the area
- Something you genuinely want to happen
- Proactive Statement (start with an action verb)
- Observable/Measurable Outcome

Outcomes:

How will you know when you have achieved your goal.

Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness (see attached AACJC, Policy Statement, Institutional Effectiveness)

a. Student Performance and Access
b. Program and Service Performance
c. College Performance and Effectiveness

Assessment:

How will you measure your progress. Will it be qualitative or quantitative?

APPENDIX D

PHASES OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

PHASES OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- Embrace the organizational mission and goals
- Define what you do – your specific, strategic mission in your area
- Set strategic goals
- Formulate a strategy to achieve goals
- Do it
- Evaluate
- Reformulate plan

APPENDIX E

STRATEGIC PLANNING COUNCIL FEEDBACK SURVEY

Northwest Community College
Strategic Planning Council Feedback Survey

Members of the Strategic Planning Council designed the following survey in order to obtain feedback regarding the strategic planning process from staff members. The feedback will be an important part of our efforts to continue improving the strategic planning process at Northwest Community College.

Compiled results will be available to all interested parties; however, your individual responses will remain anonymous. In order to maintain your anonymity, two guidelines must be followed.

1. Please DO NOT write your name or any other identifying marks anywhere on the survey. A unique code number appears on each survey; the first four digits in the code identify your administrative/instructional area and the next three digits are arbitrary numbers to assist in data entry. You cannot be identified by this code.

2. When you have completed the survey, please place it in the large manila envelope labeled "Completed Questionnaires" yourself. DO NOT let anyone hand it in for you and DO NOT hand in a survey for anyone else.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Questions are printed on both sides of each page. Please take the time to consider your answers carefully. Choose only one response per question unless otherwise specified.

If you have not been employed at MHCC for more than six months, please do not fill out this survey.

Your candid answers are greatly appreciated.

CODE#: ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___

For each question, please circle the one response choice that best fits your answer. (Please ignore the tiny numbers that appear near the response choices. They are there only to make data entry easier.)

1.	Did you participate in the strategic planning process in your area to develop the 1993-1996 plan (developed Spring 1993 - Fall 1993)?	Yes 1	No 2
2.	Did you participate in the strategic planning process in your area to develop the 1994-1997 plan (developed Spring 1994 - Fall 1994)?	Yes 1	No 2
3.	In which activities did you participate to help develop the 1994-1997 plan? (Please respond for each activity listed. You may answer yes to more than one of the following statements.) Did you . . .		
	Meet with your whole group?	Yes 1	No 2
	Work in a sub-group?	Yes 1	No 2
	Write a program plan?	Yes 1	No 2
	Do the computer input for the area plan?	Yes 1	No 2
	Work with more than one area?	Yes 1	No 2
	Revise drafts of one or more plants?	Yes 1	No 2
4.	When did you start working on your area's 1994-1997 plan? (Please choose one.)	Spring 1994 Summer 1994 Fall 1994	1 2 3
5.	Approximately how many hours did you spend working on the 1994-1997 Strategic Plan? (Exclude time spent inputting the plan.) (Please choose one.)	0 1-2 hours 3-5 hours 6-10 hours 10+ hours	1 2 3 4 5
6.	Did your area's planning process taken less time this year (1994) as compared to last (1993)?	Yes 1 Don't Know 3	No 2

7.	Was your area's 1994-1997 plan completed by October 15, 1994?	Yes 1	No 2	Don't Know 3
8a.	Have you ever attended a training session for strategic planning?	Yes 1	No 2	
8b.	Please give an answer for each training session listed. (You may answer yes to more than one of the following statements.) Did you attend . . .			
	May 1994 Strategic Planning?	Yes 1	No 2	
	September 1994 Management Training?	Yes 1	No 2	
	September 1994 Inputting?	Yes 1	No 2	
	Fall 1993 Inputting?	Yes 1	No 2	
	Fall 1993 Management Team Training?	Yes 1	No 2	
	Special training for your area?	Yes 1	No 2	
9.	Was your 1994-1997 Strategic Plan electronically inputted either using PC Software of OPN?	Yes 1	No 2	Don't Know 3
10.	Were you aware you could contact Research and Planning or Computer Services for assistance with strategic planning?	Yes 1	No 2	
11.	Were you aware there was a glossary of terms available with the strategic planning form?	Yes 1	No 2	
12.	Did your area complete the 1993-1996 Strategic Plan Assessment Form?	Yes 1	No 2	
13.	Did your area meet the objectives of the 1993-1996 strategic plan assessment using a different method than the form provided?	Yes 1	No 2	Don't Know 3
14.	Did you use an outside facilitator for your area strategic planning process? (Please circle only one answer.)	Yes, for the 1993-96 plan. 1 Yes, for the 1994-1997 plan. 2 We used a facilitator for both plans. 3 We never used a facilitator. 4		

For each of the following statements, please circle the one number that best reflects your agreement with it where:

1 = Disagree
2 = Somewhat Disagree
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Agree
5 = Agree
NA = Not Applicable

15. Adequate training was provided to design a strategic planning process that met our area needs. 1 2 3 4 5

16. The glossary of terms was helpful to our group in the strategic planning process. 1 2 3 4 5

17. The Strategic Planning Assessment Form for the 1993-1996 plan was helpful in doing our 1994-1997 strategic plan. 1 2 3 4 5

18. The Strategic Planning Assessment Form was easy to fill out. 1 2 3 4 5

19. The use of an outside facilitator enhanced the strategic planning process in our area. 1 2 3 4 5 NA

20. I feel I need additional training in the strategic planning process. 1 2 3 4 5

21. My immediate supervisor keeps me informed of the strategic planning process and my participation in it. 1 2 3 4 5

22. I had questions about the strategic planning that my immediate supervisor could not answer. 1 2 3 4 5

23. I understand what will happen to my area plan after it is completed. 1 2 3 4 5

24. I am familiar with my area's entire strategic plan. 1 2 3 4 5

25. My area's goals are clearly related to the institutional goals. 1 2 3 4 5

26. Working on my area's mission contributed to a unified sense of purpose and team. 1 2 3 4 5

27. I believe that the strategic planning process is not clearly linked to institutional budget decisions. 1 2 3 4 5

28. The strategic planning process supports teamwork. 1 2 3 4 5

29. The strategic planning process increases communication between my area and other areas. 1 2 3 4 5

30. My area used a collaborative process to reach agreement on the priorities for our strategic plan goals. 1 2 3 4 5

31. In my area, reaching a consensus on area goals contributed to deeper understanding of one another's work. 1 2 3 4 5

32. The strategic planning process contributed to the actual accomplishment of our area goals. 1 2 3 4 5

33. Strategic planning is a waste of time. 1 2 3 4 5

34. Strategic planning has refined the strategic thinking in our area. 1 2 3 4 5

35. Strategic planning focuses on meeting the needs of our students/customers. 1 2 3 4 5

36. Strategic planning is simply the latest management tool; it will go away soon. 1 2 3 4 5

37. I feel my area's strategic plan is acknowledged and valued. 1 2 3 4 5

38. I feel optimistic that my area's strategic plan will become reality. 1 2 3 4 5

39. I can see positive changes as a result of strategic planning:

. . . . in my program. 1 2 3 4 5

. . . . in my area/division. 1 2 3 4 5

. . . . within the institution. 1 2 3 4 5

40. What is your primary employee group affiliation: (Please circle only one answer.)

Classified	1
Supervisory	2
Management	3
Faculty	4
Part-time Staff	5
Confidential	6
Public Safety	7
Other	8

41. How many years have you worked at the college? (Round to the year.) ________ YEARS

42. Have you ever been a member of the Strategic Planning Council? Yes 1 No 2

Write your answers in the space provided. If you need more room, please use the back of this page.

43. What topics would you like to see addressed in a strategic planning training session?

44. What was the one thing that worked best in the strategic planning process?

45. If there was one thing you would like to see changed in the process of strategic planning, what would it be?

46. If you have any additional comments on the strategic planning process, please add them here.

When you have completed the survey, please check your answers to make sure you did not skep any questions or pages. We greatly appreciate your conscientiousness!

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete the survey!